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—YASMIN WILLIAMS
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JUST FOR THE LOVE OF IT

Revered fingerpicker and folk evangelist Happy Traum shares some of the musical magic that's inspired him over the years. (p. 16)



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THE FRONT PORCH

Happy Traum with Santa Cruz Guitar Company founder Richard Hoover



COURTESY OF SANTA CRUZ GUITARS

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Happy Traum in the acoustic guitar world. If you have learned to play the instrument any time in the last 40 or 50 years, then you are indebted to Traum, who as an author and producer of Homespun recordings and videos has made roots music instruction accessible to generations of musicians while helping shape the ways in which guitar music is notated and taught.

Traum is, of course, a fingerstyle great with roots in the 1950s Greenwich Village folk scene, as well the blues revival. As such, he is directly connected to many of the greatest acoustic guitarists. Traum's mission has always been to freely share what he has learned in his long musical life, which has included everything from studying at the feet of Piedmont blues guitarist and singer Brownie McGhee to playing in a longstanding duo with his late brother, Artie Traum, to recording with Bob Dylan and even the poet Allen Ginsberg.

Last summer we sent Editor at Large Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers to visit Traum at his home in Woodstock, New York. Over the course of a warm afternoon, Traum looked back at some of his best recorded moments, breaking down the thinking behind these classic accompaniments and solos. The music is transcribed note-for-note in Rodgers' feature; be sure to watch Traum play and explain the examples at AcousticGuitar.com. And in case you're curious, the guitar that Traum is playing is the brand-new Santa Cruz HT/13 signature model that graces the cover,

glowingly reviewed here by jazz guitarist and educator Sean McGowan.

While fingerstyle is obviously a recurring theme in AG—it's one of the most fundamental ways of playing the guitar—it plays a more dominant role in this issue than usual. In an overview lesson feature, noted fingerstylist and longtime AG contributor Doug Young traces the evolution of the technique, both on nylon- and steel-string instruments, focusing on some of the most significant players and their contributions and approaches.

Other features throughout the magazine—profiles of the Cuban composer Leo Brouwer and the modern solo guitarist Yasmin Williams—speak to the breadth of the technique. For this issue's Guitar Talk, John Pizzarelli describes how he dealt with the loss of his parents by making fingerstyle nylon-string arrangements of Pat Metheny compositions. In Weekly Workout, John W. Warren teaches how to use classical source materials—with Francisco Tárrega's "Etude in E minor" as an example—to generate fingerstyle improvisation.

Though I use a plectrum pretty much all of the time, reading these pieces compelled me to set aside the pick, playing some of the Brouwer etudes I hadn't worked on since college in the 1990s, improvising on the Tárrega study, and learning some of Traum's signature moves. I hope that this issue will similarly inspire you to delve into fingerstyle or further refine your right- (or left-) hand technique.

—Adam Perlmutter



Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com

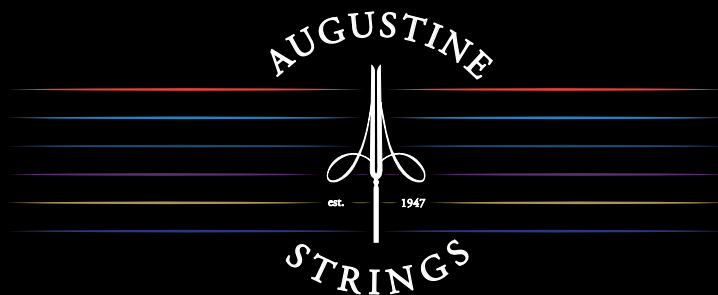


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GUITAR TALK



THE KURLAND AGENCY

Better Days Ahead

John Pizzarelli emerges from the pandemic with a solo guitar tribute to his hero Pat Metheny

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020, John Pizzarelli, one of the busiest guitarists in the jazz world, found himself with all of his gigs cancelled for the undetermined future—and without a whole lot to do. At the same time, he endured personal tragedy as he lost his father, the legendary jazz and studio guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, and his mother, Ruth Pizzarelli, within days of each other, due to complications from the virus.

Having decamped from his New York apartment to his lakeside cabin an hour north of the city, Pizzarelli poured his grief into

practicing for hours a day on his seven-string classical. He had long been a fan of jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, and started arranging some of Metheny's works for solo guitar, which he then posted in informal YouTube videos from the cabin.

Pizzarelli is best known for his smooth vocals and sprightly and sophisticated guitar work in small ensemble settings; on recent albums he has explored the music of Johnny Mercer, Paul McCartney, and Frank Sinatra and Antônio Carlos Jobim. He had never recorded a solo guitar album until *Better Days Ahead* (reviewed on p. 76), which collects the

evocative Metheny arrangements he made while sheltering in place.

I checked in with Pizzarelli last summer, just as he was about to perform selections from the album for the reopening of NYC's Blue Note Jazz Club. Our conversation has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

It came as a bit of a surprise to see your YouTube videos of Pat Metheny arrangements when you uploaded them in 2020. What is your history with Metheny's music?

A lot of people were surprised because of the nature of what I do normally as a guitar

player. I think I first saw Pat on a PBS television show [*Austin City Limits*] when I was 16 or 17, at a party in a friend of a friend's basement. I'll always remember watching him play the melody to "Phase Dance" on an acoustic guitar, and swinging around a Gibson ES-175 that was strapped on his back to play the solo.

I've been a big fan ever since. His solo guitar work—"Cherish," "Alfie," "Rainy Days and Mondays," and all that—is so smart. I just have so much respect for Pat. He's really hit it on all levels, not just in the guitar playing, but in the composing and the arranging—and in the way he structured the band and set all those things up with [keyboardist] Lyle [Mays] and everything, which is just so magical. I've always been very moved by all of it.

Had you played Metheny's music before the pandemic?

I played "(It's Just) Talk" with my group in the '80s, and we did "Last Train Home" on my Tuesday night gigs in Mahwah, New Jersey. I played "James" for the longest time—my wife really liked it when I played it in the house—but it wasn't until the pandemic that I really sat down with it to get the harmony right. Also, with my parents' passing, it was just a way to cope with all of it, and music was just literally coming right out of me for some reason.

So I worked on "Better Days Ahead," and then a buddy of mine said, "Well, what about 'Last Train Home'?" Rick Hayden, who co-produced the record, said, "You know, 'Antonia' is a great tune. You should look at that." I started posting videos of the arrangements on Facebook, and after a few postings, Rick said, "Okay, you're going to stop now. Don't give this thing away—it's a really great idea for an album."

I had been in touch with Pat, and he sent me his book of lead sheets that he gives out when he plays with new musicians. That was really amazing and totally unexpected. There was a chord on "Last Train Home" that I was playing one way, and it just didn't sound right. Then when I got the music, I was able to go, "Oh, *that's* the correct voicing." It was really great to know that I was getting the right voicings and melodies and really go for it.

Once you had all of the information, what was your arranging process like?

I knew when I wanted to learn "Farmer's Trust" or "Letter From Home" that the arrangements would be complete pieces just the way they were written, and I wasn't going to blow any single-note stuff. The idea was to approach any of the improvisations in a chordal style,

sort of [George] Van Eps-ian or Bucky Pizzarelli-like. So that was the challenge: coming up with some nice chord solos while trying to make it a little more unique.

The other part was, I could hear my father in my head saying, "Take your time there and enjoy that part of the song. That's a great melody there, and you can really milk it." All of these little pieces of advice that I had gotten from him throughout my life were coming into play in putting this stuff together.

What guitar did you use on the album—and why did you choose it?

I used the guitar that I had learned the pieces on. It's my Bill Moll seven-string classical, which I also played on my Sinatra-Jobim bossa nova record a few years ago. I've had the guitar for 14 years. It's a very comfortable instrument to play, and I felt like the music really lent itself to the Moll.

'I could hear my father in my head saying, "Take your time there and enjoy that part of the song."'

—JOHN PIZZARELLI

Was it a custom build?

Yeah, Bill made me an archtop at the beginning of the century. I had him do the classical, too, and I said, "I want it to look like João Gilberto's guitar, with that nice dark orange color on the top, but with the neck connecting at the 14th fret." I put an RMC pickup on it a couple of years ago, and that made it sound really great and reliable live. Also, I've been using Aquila Alchemia strings, and a Hannabach low A, which Rick recommended. These strings have changed the whole ball game for that guitar—they make it speak really well.

You recorded the album in your cabin—what was that like?

My buddy Brian Saunders had sent me his iRig, so that I could plug the guitar [via the RMC] right into my iPad. I didn't have an extra jack for a microphone, but it worked out well no matter what the people around me were doing. Sometimes my daughter would come in the cabin with her boyfriend or something, and it

wasn't going to ruin a take. The pickup was very clean and it worked out pretty well.

Basically, I would record each piece as best I could and then send it off to Rick in Edwardsville, Illinois. He would shine it up, and add reverb and stuff. I really liked the idea of the record not having a lot of air to it but still having presence. So we went with that sound and I was really pleased with it.

Yes, it's not just beautiful but it shows how diverse the Moll classical sounds, almost like an archtop at certain points.

In a review or interview, one guy said it sounded like I was using a bunch of different guitars. And there are moments like "April Wind/Phase Dance" that are very nail-y, sounding like a harp. It was just the way that certain things laid on the guitar. Sometimes it sounded a little brighter, or more choppy, but it was just one guitar. I never even changed the strings; I didn't want to screw with the sound, and the guitar was staying fairly well in tune.

What software did you use on the iPad recording?

I used GarageBand. The funny part was, I had to get my iPhone and do a FaceTime session with Rick to teach me how to use GarageBand. I call him MacGyver because anytime I have a technical question, he has an answer: "What you should do is get a cotton swab and a wire and a light bulb and hook it all together." [*Laughs.*]

I would do seven or eight takes, and then I'd find the one I liked best. I played some of the rhythmic things to a click track, because I tend to rush. I wanted them all to be even, because I tend to speed up. Using the click felt natural, like I was playing with a drummer; it kept things nice and even, and I was really pleased with that.

What have you taken away from spending so much time with Metheny's music?

It was always a challenge. When you sit down at the beginning, you go, "How can I make this my own piece yet still have some kind of respect for what Pat wrote?" Then there are the ones that I didn't get. I tried to play "Lone Jack" for a minute, but I couldn't even find a vibe for it that would work on acoustic guitar as a solo piece.

But it was fun to sit there and try different keys, and go through a lot of trial and error. My father would have really loved the record. I get a little melancholy about it, because he would have thought, "Wow, you did a good job on that!" Also, there's the idea that I made a nice little gift to my parents. It really did get me through the last year and a half in a great way.

AC

FOREVER YOUNG

Still a vital force at 83, beloved roots guitarist and educator Happy Traum reflects on a life in music—and shares a few songs

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

In 1954, when Happy Traum was an art student at New York City's High School of Music and Art, some classmates invited him to go see a Pete Seeger concert. At 16, Traum was not really familiar with Seeger or active in music, but he tagged along—and was stunned by what he discovered.

"The whole idea of hearing somebody on a stage by himself, with an instrument, was the antithesis of the pop music I was listening to on the radio, where you couldn't do that yourself," Traum recalls. "Here was a guy who told us, pretty much, 'You could do this, too. You just stand here and play some chords and sing songs.' And Pete was singing about peace and freedom and civil rights—that was something I felt but didn't know you could express. It just blew open my head. I had to go get a guitar and start learning how to play."

After that encounter with the legendary folksinger, Traum not only devoted himself to the guitar, he also embraced Seeger's lifelong mission to help others make music themselves. So, along with embarking on a career as a performer, Traum became a guitar teacher—and he ultimately made a signal contribution to modern music instruction by starting Homespun Tapes with his wife, Jane, in 1967. From reel-to-reels to cassettes, VHS tapes, DVDs, and online video, Homespun has released some 700 lessons by many luminaries of American roots music—including Tony Rice, Norman Blake, Jorma Kaukonen, Chris Thile, Jerry Douglas, and Seeger himself, with a video version of his pioneering book *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*.

On a balmy summer afternoon, I visit Happy in Woodstock, New York, at the house he and Jane began building in 1970 in an old farm field, living in a tent with their kids for a few months during the construction. More than 50 years later, Happy remains a pillar of the Woodstock music scene, alongside friends and collaborators such as John Sebastian, Larry Campbell, and Cindy Cashdollar. "It's still a thriving music community," Traum says. "I feel like an elder statesman in a funny way."

I've known Traum since the beginning of *Acoustic Guitar*, interviewed him multiple times, and worked with him on my own Homespun video series teaching acoustic arrangements of Grateful Dead songs. Whether he is teaching in a workshop, in print, or on screen, I am always struck by his gift for breaking complex technique into clear steps, with a low-key, encouraging manner that makes the whole process accessible and fun.





At 83, Traum is remarkably youthful—still playing concerts and teaching at music camps like Richard Thompson's Frets and Refrains and Jorma Kaukonen's Fur Peace Ranch, in addition to his ongoing work with Homespun. Never caught up in the music business rat race, Traum always seems genuinely to play music—as suggested by the title of his most recent album—*Just for the Love of It*. And he is still creating content for Homespun, such as a new lesson on Woody Guthrie songs, as well as nearing completion of another solo album.

Sitting in his sunroom with his Santa Cruz HT/13, a brand-new signature model with a gorgeous redwood top and tone to match (see review on page 70), Traum shares a few stories and songs from across the years. What follows is a retrospective of Traum's life in music as captured by six songs.

On AcousticGuitar.com, watch Traum himself play the music transcribed below—and, of course, offer tips on how to play it yourself.

BROWNIE'S BLUES

Just a few years after first hearing Pete Seeger, Traum made another life-changing musical connection. He was a student at NYU—then with its main campus in the Bronx, where he grew up—and a friend gave him the Folkways LP *Brownie McGhee Blues*, featuring the great blues guitarist solo rather than with his duo partner Sonny Terry on harmonica. Traum obsessed over the music and learned that McGhee lived in New York, so he looked up the bluesman in the phone book and called to ask about taking lessons.

At McGhee's apartment on 125th Street, Traum got a deep immersion in a style of Piedmont blues fingerpicking that's still at the core of the music he plays today. In these informal lessons, he recalls, "We'd just start playing together. If I saw something he was doing that I didn't know, I'd stop him and say, 'What was that?' and he'd show it to me. He was very patient."

One of McGhee's core lessons was the importance of keeping steady time with the thumb. McGhee played mostly monotonic bass—thumping on a single bass note under each chord—with a thumbpick, while covering the higher strings with two metal fingerpicks. "He would stress to keep your thumb and your foot going at the same time," Traum says. "I do that to this day."

Example 1 shows a 12-bar blues pattern that McGhee taught, and used in "Good Morning Blues" and other songs. Play either a monotonic bass, as notated, or double up the bass notes with a shuffle rhythm (see the video for a demo). On top, play single notes that

Hanging in Washington Square, circa 1957 (clockwise from center left): Happy Traum, Ian Buchanan, Dave Van Ronk, and Dick Weissman.



COURTESY OF HAPPY TRAUM

outline the E7, A7, and B7 chords—McGhee's term for this was "breaking up the chords." Interestingly, McGhee did not typically play a B bass note under the B7 chord; he just continued the six-string E on the bottom (as in measure 9), muted so it didn't clash too much with the harmony.

Traum remained friends with McGhee well past his years of lessons. One of Happy's first dates with his future wife, Jane, in fact, was driving McGhee and Sonny Terry circa 1958 up to Bard College, where Happy opened for the duo. He also profiled his blues mentor in one of his early books, *Guitar Styles of Brownie McGhee*, published in 1971.

A NEW WORLD OF SONG

Beyond lessons with McGhee, the place where Traum furthered his roots music education was the buzzing folk scene centered around Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park. "People like Tom Paley [of the New Lost City Ramblers] would show me fingerpicking," Traum recalls. "Or Dave Van Ronk would be sitting there playing, and I'd be figuring out what he was doing."

One prominent musician in the Village was Gil Turner, a Pete Seeger disciple and banjo picker whom Traum met at a protest march. Turner started a group called the New World Singers with the gospel singer Delores Dixon and rhythm guitarist Bob Cohen, and he invited Traum to join as lead guitarist. Along with gigs at clubs like Gerde's Folk City and the Bitter End, Traum joined his bandmates in 1963 for his first time in a professional recording studio. A benefit for *Broadside* magazine, the session

was an extraordinary gathering of political songwriters, including Seeger, Phil Ochs, Peter La Farge, Mark Spoelstra, the Freedom Singers, and a young guy billed on the record as Blind Boy Grunt—soon to be rather well known as Bob Dylan. (He'd just signed with Columbia so couldn't use his name.)

"It was quite a group, all in one studio, all at the same time," says Traum. "We would just get up in front of a microphone, one take, sing the song, you're done." The New World Singers recorded three songs, most famously laying down the first-ever recording of "Blowin' in the Wind" while the songwriter listened. Another Dylan debut that day was "I Will Not Go Down Under the Ground (Let Me Die in My Footsteps)," which Traum sang while Dylan backed him on guitar and harmony vocals. Both tracks are available on the Folkways reissue *Broadside Ballads, Vol. 1*.

On "Blowin' in the Wind," Traum played an intro similar to **Example 2**, based on the refrain. Use C shapes, capoed at the second fret to sound in D, and alternate double-stops on the fourth and second strings with the open third string. Play fingerstyle, or hybrid style with a flatpick and your middle finger. Traum frets the F bass note in measure 3 with his thumb, but grabbing that note with the first finger works fine, too.

FINGERPICKING MASTERS

During his time with the New World Singers, Traum continued to dig deeper into his true passion: traditional folk and blues fingerpicking. That was the topic of his first lesson book, *Fingerpicking Styles for Guitar* (1965), which dug into songs and arrangements by seminal



Example 1



Example 1 is a guitar piece in 4/4 time, key of E major (indicated by three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The piece consists of 12 measures, grouped into four systems of three measures each. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps and a guitar staff with fret numbers (0-5) and bar lines. Chord changes are indicated above the staff: E7 (measures 1-4), A7 (measures 5-6), E7 (measures 7-8), B7 (measures 9-10), A7 (measure 11), and E (measure 12). The guitar staff shows a complex fretting pattern with many accidentals and bar lines, indicating a difficult piece to play.

Example 2

Capo II

Example 2 is a guitar piece in 4/4 time, key of F major (indicated by one flat: Bb). The piece consists of 12 measures, grouped into four systems of three measures each. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a guitar staff with fret numbers (0-6) and bar lines. Chord changes are indicated above the staff: F (measures 1-2), G7 (measures 3-4), C (measures 5-6), F6 (measures 7-8), Gadd9 (measures 9-10), Csus4 (measures 11-12), and C (measures 13-14). The guitar staff shows a complex fretting pattern with many accidentals and bar lines, indicating a difficult piece to play.

players such as Elizabeth Cotten, Doc Watson, Merle Travis, and Mississippi John Hurt.

Like many other guitarists of the folk revival, Traum was inspired by the melodic picking of John Hurt, and he had the chance to meet the gentle guitar master at the Village's Gaslight Café, in the tiny kitchen that served as backstage.

"The amazing thing about John Hurt to me is that I play maybe a half dozen of his songs, and every time I go back and actually listen to him, I realize—I thought I was doing it like he was, but it's not even close," says Traum. "I don't know what it is. Maybe it's the fact that his fingers were all callused from doing hard work all his life. But he had some special thing."

A few years after Hurt passed away in 1966, Traum wrote the tribute song "Mississippi John," and eventually recorded it with his brother, Artie, for the 1975 album *Hard Times in the Country*. "Mississippi John" remains in Happy's repertoire; on YouTube you can find a 2014 live version with Traum accompanied by jug band maestro Jim Kweskin. Traum fingerpicks in a classic Hurt style, using C shapes (capo 4 to sound in E) with an alternating bass. **Example 3** shows the verse accompaniment (as you'll see in the video, he adds some variations in the second pass) and the instrumental interlude, which is based on Hurt's version of "My Creole Belle."

As with the earlier Brownie McGhee blues example, the thumb is the key. "When I'm doing those kinds of songs, my style is very much that relentlessly steady bass," Traum says. "The only time I vary from that is if I'm doing a ballad with more of a flowing feel."

JAMMING WITH DYLAN

In 1966, Happy and Jane Traum moved upstate from New York City to spend a summer in Woodstock, a hub for artists long before the famous festival made it a hippie/tourist mecca. As it happened, another recent arrival in Woodstock was Bob Dylan, who was off the road and recuperating from a motorcycle accident. So Dylan and Traum reconnected, and after the Traums moved to Woodstock permanently in 1967, they often played music together informally.

This friendship resulted in Dylan inviting Traum to play bass in a memorably chaotic recording session in 1971 with beat poet Allen Ginsberg that included the multi-instrumentalists David Amram and Jon Sholle, a Buddhist monk, and, as Traum recalls, poet Gregory Corso "running around, raising a ruckus."

That same year Dylan called with another invitation—to bring a bass, guitar, and banjo

The New World Singers, (clockwise from top left): Happy Traum, Delores Dixon, Bob Cohen, and Gil Turner



COURTESY OF HAPPY TRAUM

down to the city for a duo session. "He wanted to record some songs that he had written but other people had had hits with. Bob's idea was whatever we would do sitting around the living room, just jamming, was what he wanted to put on this record."

Schlepping his instruments down to the city on the bus, Traum had no idea what he'd be playing, so everything was off the cuff, in one or two takes. In the end he and Dylan recorded four songs. Traum played banjo and bass on "You Ain't Going Nowhere" (which had been covered by the Byrds in 1968), and he added guitar to "I Shall Be Released" (featured on The Band's debut album) and "Crash on the Levee (Down in the Flood)"; Dylan's and Traum's duets of these three songs appeared on Dylan's *Greatest Hits, Vol. II*. Traum figured that the fourth song they recorded, "Only a Hobo" (which Dylan actually had recorded in the earlier *Broadside* session as well), was lost or rejected. But 20 years later, it unexpectedly surfaced on Dylan's *The Bootleg Series, Vols. 1–3*.

Example 4 shows the type of part that Traum layered on top of Dylan's rhythm guitar on "I Shall Be Released." While Dylan played out of G shapes with a capo at the

second fret (to sound in A), Traum added figures up the neck. On the C#m and Bm in measures 5 and 6, roll the chords by picking the strings quickly in sequence, low to high, with your thumb and fingers.

Dylan's music continues to be a touchstone for Traum. He's created lessons for Homespun with his own fingerpicking arrangements of Dylan songs, and on his 2015 album *Just for the Love of It*, he revisited "Down in the Flood," trading solos with his guitarist son, Adam Traum—now a performer in his own right as well as a video producer/editor for Homespun.

TAPPING INTO TRADITION

A major part of Traum's musical life was collaborating with his younger brother, Artie, from the late '60s right up until Artie passed away in 2008. The two had sibling musical chemistry, for sure, but also very different styles and interests.

"He was a very talented guitar player and songwriter," Happy says of Artie. "He was always more adventurous musically than I was. I was always pretty strictly traditional and stuck with blues, folk songs, and ballads. He started on banjo, but when he started playing guitar, he actually took a couple of lessons with

**Example 3**
Capo IV**Verse**

Chords: C, F, C, G7, C, C7

6 F D/F# G7

1. 2.

*Substitute cue-sized note (B) on repeat.

Interlude

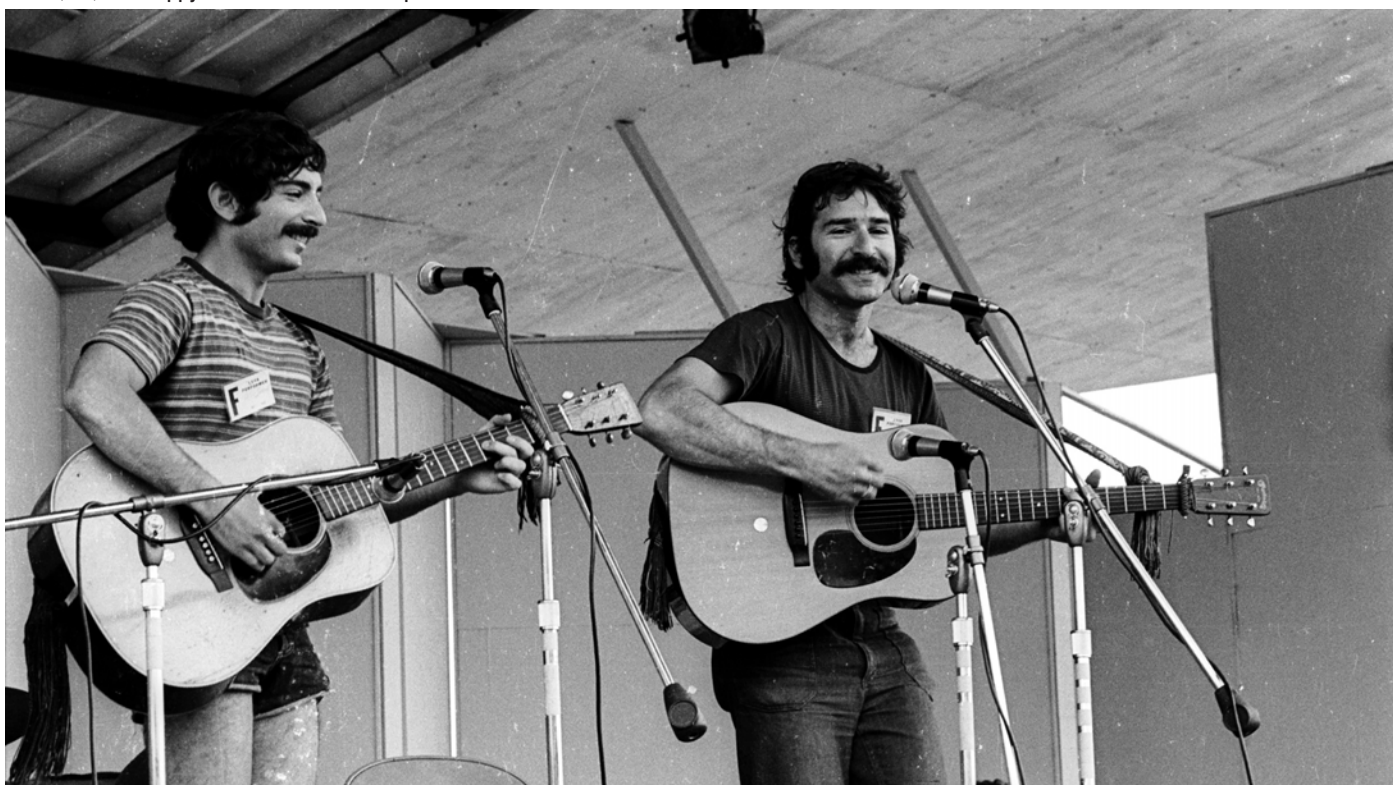
Chords: C, F, C, G, G7, G, C, C7, F

12

18 G7 G C C7 F

23 C G G7 C

Artie (left) and Happy Traum at the 1968 Newport Folk Festival



COURTESY OF HAPPY TRAUM

Jim Hall, the great jazz artist. So when he was a teenager, he was already stretching out into jazz stuff.” In the ’90s and early 2000s, Artie found considerable success with instrumental smooth jazz on guitar.

Even with his jazz leanings, Artie was “very well grounded in the traditional stuff,” Happy adds. “When we played together, he fell into what I did more than I fell into what he did.”

The duo’s first album, *Happy and Artie Traum*, released by Capitol in 1970, closed with the song “Golden Bird,” which sounds like an old mountain ballad but actually is a Happy original that’s been covered by a number of other artists—notably fellow Woodstock musician Levon Helm, in a haunting performance on his final studio album, *Electric Dirt*.

“Golden Bird” dates from when Happy had recently moved to Woodstock and was first starting to put songs together with Artie. “I was living right up the hill,” Happy says. “I had Doc Watson in mind when I wrote the song, thinking, ‘What kind of a song would he like?’ And then I came up with that kind of folk tale.”

On the original recording of “Golden Bird,” Happy played clawhammer banjo while Artie flatpicked the guitar; in 1978, Happy revisited the song on the solo album *American Stranger* with his own flatpicking guitar. Nowadays, though, he plays fingerstyle exclusively and has arranged “Golden Bird” in dropped-D tuning, as shown in **Example 5**.

The song is in the key of G, and while singing he plays a boom-chuck-type pattern, picking bass notes with the thumbpick and strumming the treble strings with his fingers. The notation shows a Carter-style instrumental break. Pick the melody with your thumb and add touches of the chords with your fingers, especially on beats 2 and 4.

If you’re familiar with Helm’s take on “Golden Bird,” by the way, it’s interesting to note that not only did Helm slow the song way down, but his arrangement does not use the V chord at the end of the progression. Instead, he went straight back to the I. In Traum’s key, G, that would mean substituting a G for the D in the last two bars—a very different, starker sound.

TIMELESS MELODIES

Although Traum is proud of songs like “Golden Bird,” songwriting has never been his focus—he estimates he’s got around eight or ten original songs in his repertoire, plus some co-writes with Artie. In the writing process, Happy says, “I keep getting a few lines into a song and then I think, ‘Wait a minute. There are so many great songs out there. Why do they need me to do this?’ I don’t have that drive.”

What does drive him is arranging great songs for guitar. One lovely example is his take on “The Water Is Wide,” played in dropped-D tuning and featured on *Just for the Love of It*. His video demo for this lesson isn’t precisely the same as the album

track; in performance, he may follow the general shape of a worked-out arrangement, but the details vary each time. (A complete transcription of his album version is available from Homespun.)

Traum is a big fan of dropped D, for songs not just in D but in G, A, and other keys. One of the obvious draws of the tuning is the octave D notes on the open sixth and fourth strings—great for alternating bass. “And then when you move up the neck, you can use all six strings,” he says. “Even in E, when you’re tuned to standard, if you go up the neck, you have your bass E but you don’t have the [open] fifth and fourth strings.”

Example 6 shows one instrumental pass through “The Water Is Wide.” The picking style, he says, is “the antithesis of the steady thumb,” with bass notes often ringing out for two beats or skipping beats entirely. In measures 3, 6, and 9, shift up to fifth position, taking advantage of the open-string bass notes. Bars 6, 8 and 14 each include a quarter-note triplet, adding a nice flow to the ascending melody lines.

For an additional dropped-D guitar arrangement by Traum, see the transcription of “Worried Blues” on page 56.

SHARING THE MUSIC

Toward the end of my visit, Traum opens his iPad and shares some rough mixes from his in-progress solo album. He has a long history with many of the songs, including Brownie McGhee’s “Living with the Blues”; the traditional ballad “When



Example 4

Example 4 musical notation. The piece is in A major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has two measures, with chords A and Bm indicated above the staff. The second system has four measures, with chords C#m, Bm, and A indicated above the staff. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is written on a six-string staff with fret numbers indicated below the notes. The piece ends with the word "etc." in the final measure.

Example 5

Tuning: D A D G B E

Example 5 musical notation. The piece is in D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system has six measures, with chords G, Em, C, G, Em, and G indicated above the staff. The second system has six measures, with chords D, G, and C indicated above the staff. The third system has five measures, with chords G, F, G, F, and D indicated above the staff. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is written on a six-string staff with fret numbers indicated below the notes. The piece ends with a double bar line and a final chord D.

First Unto This Country”; Blind Willie McTell’s loping blues “In the Wee Midnight Hour”; his own “Love Song to a Girl in an Old Photograph,” written a half century ago; and even a Broadway tune—a solo guitar arrangement of “How Are Things in Glocca Morra?” from *Finian’s Rainbow*. With guests like Larry Campbell, Bruce Molsky,

Geoff Muldaur, John Sebastian, and Cindy Cashdollar, the album will be, as always, a reflection of Traum’s musical friendships and community.

No doubt when the album comes out, it’ll also be accompanied by lessons to help other guitarists play these great songs. Traum’s desire to share his discoveries and passions doesn’t fade.

“If I’m learning some new song or some new technique on the guitar,” he says, “somewhere in the back of my mind I’m thinking, ‘Now how can I show this to other people? How can I convey to other people the fun I’m having with this?’ Even now, at this advanced age, I’m still thinking in those terms.” **AG**

Example 6

Tuning: D A D G B E

System 1 (Measures 1-4): Chords: D, D/c#, Gmaj7, D, Bm, A.

System 2 (Measures 5-8): Chords: Bm, Bm/A, G, A, Asus4, A.

System 3 (Measures 9-12): Chords: Dmaj7, Bm, Bm/A, Gmaj7, G6, Em7.

System 4 (Measures 13-16): Chords: A, A7, G, D.

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Yasmin Williams

SONIC EXPLORER

Yasmin Williams and her otherworldly acoustic soundscapes

BY E.E. BRADMAN

“Some people need to sit down with an instructor and be forced to learn the fundamentals,” says Yasmin Williams. “For other people, like me, exploration starts right at the beginning. Otherwise, why bother playing?”

Williams’ singular palette—which includes percussive accents on her guitar’s body, “lap-tapping,” using a tap shoe to keep time, and incorporating instruments such as kora and kalimba in real time—is on full display on *Urban Driftwood* (Spinster), an update of her celebrated debut, 2018’s *Unwind*, and a showcase for her multiscale Skytop Grand Concert guitar (see Great Acoustics in the March/April 2020 issue).

The Northern Virginia native started on clarinet in third grade, and when she picked up guitar in middle school, little did Williams know how much she’d be influenced by the grooves she heard growing up, as well as the nonwestern approaches, especially Hindustani music, that she absorbed while attending New York University on the way to a 2017 degree in theory and composition. The results may recall the distinctive stylings of giants like Michael Hedges and Stanley Jordan, but the fact that Williams has come this far by pursuing a mostly internal agenda hints at exciting possibilities. (She confirms that there may be film scoring and a trio in her future.) Most of all, she’s comfortable with herself while being aware that she has lots of living to do.

“When I get a new instrument or try a new technique, I don’t look up what other people have done, because I don’t want to be influenced in any way that’s not true to myself,” says the 25-year-old guitarist. “If I’m at a loss, I shelve it, live life, have more experiences, get better, and come back to it.”

The compositions on *Urban Driftwood* are soothing, especially in these harried times. Was that by design?

I wrote most of the songs last year, going through the emotions of everything that happened, politically, socially, and personally. I was hoping that once people hear it, they can do the same thing—use the record to reflect, meditate, or just listen to it and feel uplifted, too.

Were you thinking of a particular audience while you were writing material for the album?

Most of what I write is for me. If you’re true to yourself and there’s an audience that enjoys stuff that’s true to you, then there’s no real need to think about anything other than what you want to write.

How did you develop the confidence to listen to your inner voice?

My parents and my family have always been very supportive, so I didn’t put any limitations on myself in terms of developing my own voice. I’ve been free to have my voice, at least in my household, for my entire life.

"I EVENTUALLY GRAVITATED TOWARD ACOUSTIC GUITAR BECAUSE IT LETS YOU DO SO MUCH MORE—IT'S LIKE TEN INSTRUMENTS IN ONE."

What did you grow up listening to?

R&B, hip-hop, soul, and smooth jazz. Go-go [a sub-genre of funk] was definitely big in our house: My dad is a go-go connoisseur; my parents were both in the scene, and I played guitar in a go-go band with my brother. Chuck Brown is a favorite.

How did that music influence your approach to acoustic guitar?

I think it was more subconscious at first. When I first started playing guitar, and even when I released my first record in 2018, I was completely unaware of go-go being an influence. I didn't realize that I was taking all that in, but now I know how much of an influence it's been on me.

You also played clarinet for a long time. How did you settle on acoustic?

In middle school, I started playing Nirvana and Hendrix stuff on electric. Playing covers is fun, but I was like, "What is this really doing?" I eventually gravitated toward acoustic guitar because it lets you do so much more—it's like ten instruments in one.

Were you ever interested in studying classical guitar?

In tenth or 11th grade, I wanted to get into a classical guitar program, so I locked myself in my room and taught myself whatever it was—one of the Bach cello suites, I think. After the program, I was like, "Man, this sucks!" I remember sitting in my room going through scales, but it was only a few months before I got tired of that.

So you learned from books?

I've bought two guitar books in my life, and at this point, I don't even know where they are. I taught myself by learning songs that I enjoyed listening to. The first fingerstyle song I learned was "Blackbird" by The Beatles, and that's what got me hooked. It really is just about using Google and having patience.

I'm assuming you picked up lots of stuff from YouTube.

I didn't really look at YouTube. I didn't like the fingerstyle stuff I was hearing, and none of the players looked like me, so I wasn't really interested. I figured I could come up with something better myself, anyway. I know that sounds relatively vain, but whatever [laughs].



ZACH PIGG

You were driven to find your own path.

Once I began writing my own tunes and figuring out alternate tunings, chord shapes, and chord voicings I liked, it was a wrap. Figuring out how I like to play was most important for me, and that's why it never felt like a chore to practice. It's just something I enjoy doing for multiple hours every day.

What are some of your favorite tunings?

One of them is D A D F# A D#, capoed on the third fret; another is D A D F A D, or open D minor, capoed on the seventh. Those both sound pretty good with kora. Another favorite is C G B G B D, which I used on "Swift Breeze," from *Urban Driftwood*. Open D, usually capoed somewhere, is my go-to tuning for basically everything. And I settled on F# G E G B D for my harp guitar. It's weird, but it works.

You also seem to use more than a few extended techniques.

I don't think of them as extended anymore.

Actually, I don't know if I ever did. I just think of them as ways to make the sounds I hear in my head. If I want a metallic sound on the guitar, I use a guitar hammer so it sounds like a hammered dulcimer. If I want to have a bowed sound, I use a bow. I love harmonics, and if I want a chiming sound, I'll use harmonics. Even lap-tapping itself is an extended technique, but to me, it's just another natural way of playing.

How do you see yourself in the mostly non-Black world of acoustic guitar?

When I first started, I didn't want to think of myself in terms of being anything other than just a guitarist. I didn't want to delve too deeply into what being a Black guitarist means. Thanks to my parents, I'm very comfortable with myself, and I've never had a problem being in majority white spaces. But nowadays I'm reveling in growing up the way I did. I have so many different points of reference that people don't have in this genre. Why not use them? **AC**

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Leo Brouwer





SILVIO RODRIGUEZ

An Afro-Cuban Legacy

How Leo Brouwer has redefined classical guitar repertoire with his blend of Yoruban and modernist elements

BY MARK SMALL

For six decades, Cuban-born Leo Brouwer has been at the vanguard of guitarist-composers. His huge and influential oeuvre for guitar receives more performances than that of any other living composer. He has penned works for scores of classical guitarists, with John Williams, Julian Bream, Shin-ichi Fukuda, and Sharon Isbin among them. Brouwer's diverse catalog includes numerous pieces for solo guitar, as well as chamber works with guitar, guitar duos and quartets, and an unequalled 12 concertos for guitar. His large non-guitar output includes string quartets, symphonic, chamber, and choral pieces, solo works for a variety of instruments, and film scores. He has conducted orchestras across the globe (including the Berlin Philharmonic and the Scottish National Symphony orchestras among others) and served as music director and conductor for the Cuban National Symphony and Orquesta de Córdoba in Spain.

Born in 1939 in Havana, Cuba, Brouwer was introduced to the guitar in his early years by his father, Juan, a doctor and amateur guitarist. He progressed rapidly, learning by ear repertoire by Heitor Villa-Lobos, Francisco Tárrega, and Enrique Granados—all composers whose work has been popular with classical guitarists. As a young teenager, he began formal studies with Isaac Nicola, a revered Cuban teacher who had been a pupil of Emilio Pujol, who in turn had studied with Tárrega. Nicola guided him through guitar literature from five centuries, building a solid foundation for a performing career. Brouwer made his debut as a concert guitarist at 17 and ultimately became an international recitalist.

MUSICAL PEDIGREE

Music is part of Brouwer's heritage. While his surname reflects his paternal grandfather's Dutch lineage, on his mother's side were the Lecuonas. Brouwer's grandmother, Ernestina Lecuona, was a pianist, singer, and composer who toured Mexico and South America with the women's orchestra she founded. Her more famous brother, Ernesto Lecuona, was a pianist and composer of symphonic music as well as piano works, songs, and film scores.

Like his renowned great uncle, Brouwer had an interest in classical music and Cuban culture, but his musical path veered toward African influences after a youthful experience with Yoruban ritual music. The musical rhythms and religious rituals brought to Cuba by enslaved Africans ultimately became a motivator for Brouwer to begin composing.

Guitarist Zaira Meneses mentions a conversation she had with Brouwer during his 2018 visit to the Boston home she shares with her husband and fellow guitarist, Eliot Fisk. "Leo said that as a child he had wandered into the forest near his home and saw from a distance fire, animals, and people dancing to music," Meneses relates. "He went closer and found it was a voodoo ritual. A woman handed him a glass

of what he thought was water and he drank it. It was pure alcohol and he started hallucinating." The heat, drumming, singing, and overall atmosphere were transformative, he related. Brouwer has mentioned that from that point forward, he became passionate about African ritual music and later sought to blend Afro-Cuban elements with the European classical and avant-garde techniques that caught his ear.

EARLY STYLISTIC HALLMARKS

By 1956, Brouwer had begun composing for guitar. What grew to be a set of three pieces without title (*Tres Piezas sin Título*), were among his first efforts. In these brief works, he incorporates two Afro-Cuban rhythms: *tresillo* (syncopated permutations of three pulses) and *cinquillo* (syncopations with five pulses). Also surfacing in these nascent works is Brouwer's predilection for stark, dissonant intervals of seconds and sevenths and dense, chromatically rich chords. These are hallmarks of Brouwer's style that show up in music penned throughout his career and reveal his early attraction to the sounds of modernists Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók.

Brouwer is primarily a self-taught composer, but in 1959 he received a scholarship from the Cuban government to study composition and conducting at the Juilliard School in New York. There, he encountered the music of Darius Milhaud, Lukas Foss, Paul Hindemith, and others. In one recent interview, Brouwer offered high praise for the professors and the library at Juilliard. As a new student, he was surprised to find a humble Cuban edition of the first five of his *Estudios Sencillos* (Simple Etudes) among the library's holdings.

Money got tight after his first year, and Brouwer transferred to the Hartt School at the University of Hartford in Connecticut. Guitar pedagogue and longtime Hartt faculty member Richard Provost was Brouwer's classmate there in 1960. "He was a much more advanced player than I was at that time," Provost recalled in a phone conversation. "I remember him giving a performance of the Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco quintet with the resident string quartet at Hartt. That's the only performance that I know he did at Hartt. The rest of the time he focused on composing."

Brouwer was at Hartt for part of the academic year, but when relations between the United States government and Cuba were severed in 1961, he returned to Havana. He took a post there as co-founder and director of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (Cuban Institute of Film Arts and Industry). Over the decades he has composed some 60 film scores.



JUAN MIGUEL MORALES

A CROSSROADS

Brouwer was at the peak of his powers as a guitarist in the late 1970s, as evidenced by the *Leo Brouwer 4 Collection*, a double-CD set released in 1999. It consists of live concert recordings made in Havana and Houston in 1978. Throughout, Brouwer displays dazzling technique in genre-jumping repertoire ranging from Renaissance works to J.S. Bach ("Chaconne") to Scott Joplin ("The Entertainer") to a jazzed-up version of Villa Lobos' "Prelude No. 3" (backed by the Cuban fusion group Irakere). He had made recordings for such labels as Deutsche Grammophon and Erato before he stopped performing after experiencing a hand injury in the early 1980s. Thereafter, his focus turned to composing and conducting.

But before ending his performing career, Brouwer was a featured recitalist at the Toronto International Guitar Competition in 1975. That was the year that Sharon Isbin won, and when she encountered Brouwer and his music. "North America first became aware of Leo when he played there," Isbin shared in a phone call. "He had such a new, unheard-of kind of music and his presentation was very exciting. We forged a connection at Toronto, and I wanted to explore as much of his music as I could. I recorded some of his pieces and sent him the

album, but that was the extent of it. Then, one day in 1981, six years after I'd met him, I received an envelope he sent from Mexico. Inside it was *El Decameron Negro* with a dedication to me. I was astonished because we'd never discussed him writing anything for me."

The work's three movements have descriptive titles: "The Harp of the Warrior," "The Flight of the Lovers through the Valley of the Echoes," and "Ballad of the Maiden in Love." "The next time I saw him was at a festival in Finland and I played it for him," Isbin continues. "He explained that the movements were based on love stories collected in Africa by 19th Century German ethnologist Leo Frobenius. I found two of the stories in a library, but asked Leo about the third because I couldn't find it. He said that he'd made that one up for me."

The work showcases romantic and modern influences and now ranks among Brouwer's most frequently performed and recorded works. Isbin first recorded it on her 1990 album *Road to the Sun* and revisited it on 2020's *Affinity*. "When I premiered it, I got the sense that this piece would be momentous," she says. "It was the first of a new direction in Leo's style. He had for the moment abandoned some of the more avant-garde techniques heard in 'La Espiral Eterna' [1971] and other

works and returned to more tonal ideas. This piece is programmatic—something that fires your imagination. Having the stories as background gives it a sense of color and depth and the Afro-Cuban elements are strong. There is call and response, which is characteristic of African drumming and dance as a conversation between the musicians. That appealed to people and has made it an iconic work.”

EL MAESTRO

Musicologists identify three style periods in Brouwer’s composing career. The first, 1956–1964, is characterized by thematic material and rhythms inspired by Afro-Cuban ritual music blended with 20th Century harmonies yielding music that is distinctive and fairly tonal. During his second period, 1968–1979, Brouwer was heavily influenced by the European avant-garde movement and produced such titles as “Tarantos,” “Parabola,” and “Canticum.” The output in his third period, 1980 to the present, marks a blending of tonal practices, Afro-Cuban materials, and some avant-garde elements.

Eliot Fisk has been a friend and colleague of Brouwer’s for decades. “He is remarkable in his approach to music and life,” Fisk states with enthusiasm. “He’s just as curious about life now as when I met him in 1975. He has written an enormous amount of music and used a variety of forms, musical languages, and approaches. I recently played 12 of his early *Estudios Sencillos*. A lot the DNA of his music is in those brief pieces. You could take any one of them and make a big sonata from it because there are so many ideas.”

Brouwer takes abstract inspiration from geometric design, painting, literature, film, and other extramusical forms. He employs small musical components in constructing a piece. Much of his music features short, angular melodic cells. One notable exception is the melancholic “Un Día de Noviembre (“A Day in November”), the main theme from the 1972 movie of the same name by Cuban director Humberto Solás. It was an ensemble piece in the soundtrack, but Brouwer’s later solo guitar arrangement has been embraced widely by two generations of international players.

In a series of emails and voice recordings sent from his home in Cuba, Brouwer detailed his thoughts on melody. “In earlier centuries, melody was one of the most important parts of the structure in music,” he said. “But starting in the 20th century, melody became just one more element among the four or five that constitute a musical creation. Personally, I don’t care if melodies as such are ‘pretty’ or if they are the main feature in the compositional architecture.

Melody is just another element. It can be a conductive line, bass line, pedal point, or the accompaniment. It can reemerge with variations. In the 20th century, many composers—renowned ones among them—still conceived the division between melody, accompaniment, harmony, rhythm, etc.” Brouwer says his methods include employing the rhythm as the melody, the melody as the rhythm, or even accompaniment as a main feature. “In my opinion, the extrapolation of compositional components and the metamorphosis or transformation of one into another is a supreme exercise in creativity.”

Brouwer acknowledges that he never uses the guitar or any instrument when composing. “He doesn’t want to be seduced by the instrument,” Fisk suggests. “What he writes is always enjoyable to play on the guitar; he doesn’t ask the instrument to do what it doesn’t want to do. Somehow, he always finds a way to throw you

‘No one has penetrated more deeply into the mystery of the guitar than Leo!’

—ELIOT FISK

an open string when you need it. That’s not to say some of his music isn’t hard to play, but it always teaches you something about the instrument. He invents new sounds for it all the time. No one has penetrated more deeply into the mystery of the guitar than Leo. He is a unique character in the history of our instrument and has created a huge, high-quality catalog. We’re lucky to have him.”

IRREPRESSIBLE, UNSINKABLE

Fisk relates that in addition to professional triumphs, Brouwer has also experienced major hardships. “Without getting into specifics, I know that he has overcome some very serious health challenges over the years,” says Fisk. “But he is irrepressible and has never been sunk by storms that would have put someone else out of commission. It’s a remarkable character trait.”

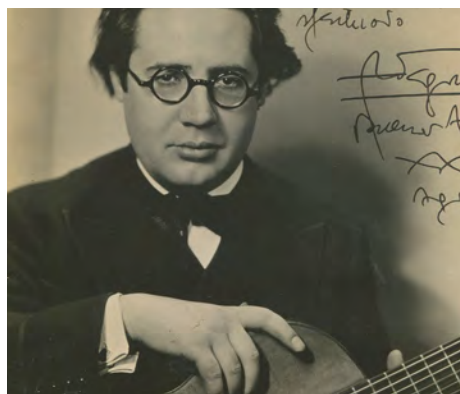
At 82, Brouwer is currently working through a stack of commissions for new pieces of various types. One commission is a set of

preludes for Zaira Meneses. She first met Brouwer when she was 15, visiting relatives in Cuba, and has kindled a deeper friendship with him in recent years. She performed his *Concierto Elegiaco* with the maestro himself conducting at the 2018 Boston GuitarFest. Afterwards, he offered to compose something for her. “I didn’t want to be presumptuous and ask him to write for me, so it was great when the idea came from him,” she says. “He sent me ‘*Preludio Elegiaco*,’ which is about two and a half minutes long. It hints at a theme from the concerto and comes from the experience we had onstage performing it. He wrote it in about two weeks. As soon as I started reading through it, I emailed to tell him I wanted more.”

Brouwer is currently completing five additional movements for a set that will be titled *Preludios Elegiacos*. Meneses is planning a recording that will include the new work and Brouwer’s popular six *Preludios Epigrámicos*. Meneses and Fisk observed Brouwer’s extreme focus during his visits to Boston. “He is serious about his work,” Meneses comments. “When he was at our home, he would write for eight hours straight at our dining room table without taking a break.”

Brouwer’s current efforts involve revising older works in addition to composing new ones. Recently completed works include a cycle of guitar pieces: *Motivos de Son*, inspired by the texts of Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. Another project, for harp—*Fables of the Black Decameron*—is dedicated to Taiwanese harpist Noël Wan. *Juego de Manos* is for viola da gamba player Roland Martin; *Sonata de Primavera No. 2* for flute is dedicated to Niurka González; *Sonata No. 2* is for cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason; and *Perpetuum Mobile* for clarinetist Osiris Molina and guitarist René Izquierdo. Additional items include music for the Australian quartet Guitar Trek and the Newman & Oltman Duo, who put out an entire album of Brouwer’s works, called *The Book of Imaginary Beings: The Music of Leo Brouwer for Two Guitars*, in 2020. Brouwer is also revising some orchestral works and updating editions for his publishing house Ediciones Espiral Eterna (eeebrouwer.com).

“To me, composing is a game of marbles,” Brouwer says. “I’m not seeking to write the greatest symphony of the 21st Century, or something along those lines. I want to entertain myself by playing with the highs, the intensity, the silences, the sonorous explosions, the nuances, the whispers, a great number of experiences of that kind. I try to write my reflections on life, nature, and art in general. I am happy with what I do and I will continue.” **AC**



Merle Travis, upper left; Elizabeth Cotten, upper right; Blind Blake, center; Andrés Segovia, lower right

SEGOVIA AND BLIND BLAKE: WIKIMEDIA; MERLETRAVIS: COLUMBIA RECORDS; ELIZABETH COTTEN: JOHSEL NAMKUNG

Elements of Style

MEET THE CELEBRATED PLAYERS AND LEARN THE ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES BEHIND FINGERSTYLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR BY DOUG YOUNG

Keith Richards has said that when he first heard the solo recordings of famed bluesman Robert Johnson, his first question was “Who’s that?” and his second was, “Who’s that other guy playing with him?” But there was no other player. Johnson was of course conjuring up the sound of simultaneous rhythm and lead guitars by playing fingerstyle.

Fingerstyle guitar is a technique that uses the thumb and fingers to sound individual

strings instead of relying on a pick. The ability to leverage individual fingers allows guitarists to play multiple parts at once, with separate bass lines, melodies, and accompaniment, often leading those who first hear a fingerstyle recording to think they are hearing more than one guitar.

Just as the term flatpicking often implies a certain musical style and not just the technique of using a pick, fingerstyle sometimes brings to mind a specific genre of instrumental guitar.

But taking a wider view, fingerstyle encompasses a huge range of musical styles—classical, flamenco, jazz, folk, world music, and beyond—all bound together by a fundamentally similar technique. This feature will explore these styles, along with a bit of the history of fingerstyle guitar, and some of the more influential players who have applied the technique to different genres. It will also present a variety of examples to get you started with this versatile and essential approach to guitar.

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THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

The history of fingerstyle guitar mirrors the history of the guitar itself in many ways. Early ancestors of the guitar were often plucked with a quill—the predecessor of the pick. But with the development of the lute, by the early 1500s players began using their thumb and fingers to produce polyphonic music. John Dowland was one of the best-known lutenists in England and his compositions remain popular with guitarists to this day. Bach also composed for the lute; his “Bourée in E Minor,” an excerpt of which is shown in **Example 1**, is a staple among guitarists and an excellent example of independent musical lines that require fingerstyle technique to perform on a single guitar.

Instruments that looked very much like modern classical guitars began to appear in the 1700s. Mauro Giuliani and Fernando Sor were well-known performers and composers who wrote complex pieces for the instrument, and their works remain core parts of classical guitar studies. **Example 2** is a snippet from Giuliani’s *120 Right Hand Studies*, a collection that offers great ways to develop fingerstyle technique for classical and other players.

Classical-guitar technique evolved to have fairly rigorous rules for the right-hand, involving picking with flesh and a bit of nails, and having two main strokes: *apoyando* (rest stroke), in which the finger comes to rest against an adjacent string after a note is picked, and *tirando* (free stroke), which does not involve any resting.

Few players have been as influential in the development of classical technique and repertoire as Andrés Segovia, perhaps the most celebrated proponent of the instrument. In a career that spanned more than 80 years, Segovia set the stage for newer generations of virtuoso classical guitarists, including Ida Presti, Julian Bream, John Williams, Christopher Parkening, Sharon Isbin, and many others who would help further expand the scope and repertoire of the instrument.

SPANISH AND SOUTH AMERICAN STRAINS

Flamenco guitar developed in Spain in the mid-1800s, primarily as a percussive accompaniment for dancers, and the word flamenco refers to the dance. **Example 3** demonstrates a typical flamenco strumming pattern, alternating between downstrokes of the thumb and upstrokes of the index finger. In each bar, note the percussive hit (*golpe*) on beat 3 and the accents on beats 2.5 and 4, which emphasize the rhythmicity of this spirited, dance-informed music.

Flamenco guitar evolved away from being strictly for accompaniment. Ramón Montoya is credited as one of the first flamenco musicians to explore the potential of guitar as a solo instrument. His nephew Carlos Montoya

The history of fingerstyle guitar mirrors the history of the guitar itself in many ways.

expanded flamenco’s popularity by adapting it to other types of music, including blues and jazz, performing with orchestras and touring in the United States.

Further developing the potential of flamenco guitar, Paco de Lucía became a leading figure in *nuevo flamenco*, applying his prodigious technique to jazz in collaborations with guitarists John McLaughlin and Al Di Meola, as heard on the classic album *Friday Night in San Francisco* (1981). De Lucía’s adventurous influence is apparent in the work of a new generation of players, such as Gabriela Quintero, one-half of the dynamic duo Rodrigo y Gabriela, which blends traditional fingerpicking with flamenco-inspired strumming and rock and percussive elements.

The music of South America has also played a big role in the development of fingerstyle guitar. Brazil in particular has produced countless significant fingerstyle performers and composers who blend classical techniques with the music of their country, including Heitor Villa-Lobos and Carlos Barbosa-Lima. In the late 1950s, Antônio Carlos Jobim, Baden Powell, and Luiz Bonfá helped introduce the world to Brazilian/Latin rhythms including bossa nova, which blends classical and jazz with samba and other South American styles.

Example 4 shows a typical bossa nova accompaniment pattern, most commonly played on a nylon-string guitar, in a smooth and lilting way. The bass notes are picked squarely on beats 1 and 3 by the thumb, while the index, middle, and ring fingers add syncopated jazz chords above.

A SEA CHANGE

Guitars from the 1500s to nearly 1900 were generally based on gut strings, but beginning in the late 1800s builders like the Larson Brothers began using steel strings. Part of the appeal of steel-string guitars was volume, along with brighter and more percussive sounds, making them good rhythm instruments, but players soon began using fingerstyle techniques on the new instruments as well.

Example 5 is representative of country-blues accompaniment, one of the earliest uses of fingerstyle on steel-string guitars. Here, the thumb plays a steady monotonic bass on the low E string against a rhythmic riff played using fingers on the three treble strings. Try muting the bass notes by lightly resting your hand on the bass string near the saddle and picking the bass string fairly hard to create a percussive, driving effect.

Blues and ragtime guitarists like Charley Patton, Blind Blake, Big Bill Broonzy, and Robert Johnson were among the pioneers who recorded in the 1920s and 1930s. Many other players were all but forgotten until they were

Example 1: From J.S. Bach’s “Bourrée in E Minor”

**Example 2: From Mauro Giuliani's 120 Right-Hand Studies**

*p i m a etc.

*p = thumb, i = index, m = middle, a = ring

Example 3: Flamenco Rhumba

Am G F E

*T T F T G F F etc.

Example 4: Bossa Nova Accompaniment

Am11 Bm11 E7b9

Example 5: Country Blues Accompaniment

E7 Edim7 E7 Edim7 Am6/E E Edim7 E7

rediscovered in the 1950s/early '60s folk boom—among other influential players, Reverend Gary Davis, Mississippi John Hurt, Fred McDowell, Skip James, John Lee Hooker, Son House, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Elizabeth Cotten, whose song “Freight Train” (transcribed in the July 2017 issue) is one the first fingerstyle tunes many players learn.

These legends inspired a new generation of guitarists like Rory Block, who built her career playing blues in the tradition of her mentors, including Reverend Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt. Other guitarists, like Eric Schoenberg and his cousin David Laibman, were more influenced by the ragtime side of things. Schoenberg's formidable arrangements of pieces like Charles L. Johnson's “Dill Pickle Rag” (transcribed in the September 2018 issue) raised the bar not just for ragtime players but for steel-string fingerstyle guitarists in general.

A slightly different approach emerged when the country-and-western guitarist Merle Travis, inspired by his fellow Kentuckian Mose Rager, developed the right-hand approach that came to be known as Travis picking. In this style, the thumb alternates between two bass strings, while the higher notes are picked either at the same time or between bass notes, which are often palm muted for textural effect (**Example 6**). It is difficult to overstate the widespread influence of this approach, which is the default accompaniment pattern used by so many folk singers and guitarists to this day. Travis picking also featured extensively in the

Peter, Paul, and Mary perform at the March on Washington, 1963.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

style of Chet Atkins, one of the most widely known of all guitarists, whose approach to the guitar would be the blueprint for virtuosos like Tommy Emmanuel, John Knowles, and Steve Wariner.

THE FOLK SCENE

Steel-string techniques played an essential role in the folk realm, with groups and singer-songwriters like Peter, Paul and Mary, Paul Simon, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, and Joan Baez using the guitar to accompany their vocals in creative ways. At the same time, starting in the late 1950s, solo guitarists took

fingerstyle to exciting new places. John Fahey was initially influenced by early blues players but also incorporated elements inspired by 20th-century classical composers like Béla Bartók. Fahey's approach came to be known as American primitive guitar; other practitioners of this idiosyncratic approach have included Robbie Basho, Peter Lang, and Leo Kottke, who released his seminal album *6- and 12-String Guitar* on Fahey's Takoma Records label in 1969. Fahey and his cohorts continue to influence young generations of players, including fingerstylists Gwenifer Raymond and Yasmin Williams (see feature on page 26).

Example 6: Travis Picking

Example 6: Travis Picking

The example shows two musical staves, each with a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff below it. The first staff is for the G chord, and the second staff is for the D6/F# chord. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each string (1-6) and the picking pattern (0 for open, 1-3 for fretted notes). The first staff is for the G chord, and the second staff is for the D6/F# chord.

G

C

G

D6/F#



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Meanwhile across the pond, steel-string guitarists developed a style sometimes known as folk baroque. Players like Davey Graham, Bert Jansch, and John Renbourn fused fingerstyle blues and ragtime with English medieval folk and classical songs, using both standard and alternate tunings. These concepts would spread to popular music in general. Around 1968, for instance, the singer-songwriter Donovan taught John Lennon and Paul McCartney some simple fingerpicking patterns, leading to songs such as “Julia” and “Blackbird,” the inspiration for **Example 7**, and introducing fingerstyle to a vastly larger audience.

The influence of the folk baroque movement inspired players like Pierre Bensusan and Martin Simpson to take fingerstyle technique to impressive new heights in their complex arrangements and compositions, which are often jazz-infused. And traditional music, most prominently Celtic, has also been the basis of the music of contemporary fingerstyle forces like Tony McManus and Steve Baughman.

In a different direction, another rootsy style developed in the Hawaiian Islands. The guitar first came to the Islands during the 19th century, brought by Mexican cowboys (*paniolos*), but it was native Hawaiians who explored the instrument on their own and discovered that the guitars sounded better to them if they were tuned to open chords. Because they slackened (or lowered) the strings, the style became known as slack key. Pioneers such as Gabby Pahinui, Leonard Kwan, and Sonny Chillingworth combined Hawaiian folk tunes and rhythms with fingerstyle techniques, and later players like Keola Beamer and Ledward Kaapana developed the style into a more sophisticated contemporary sound.

Like Travis picking, slack-key guitar often employs an alternating-bass approach, frequently combined with a melody harmonized in diatonic sixths. **Example 8**, in open-G tuning, demonstrates a simple melodic phrase followed by a typical turnaround lick. Open G is known as “taropatch” tuning by slack-key guitarists,

and is just one of an extensive set of alternate tunings common among slack-key players.

NONSTANDARD TUNINGS AND EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

In the late 1970s, guitarist William Ackerman launched the Windham Hill Records label, introducing his own music, as well as that of his cousin Alex de Grassi, Michael Hedges, and others. Though sometimes categorized as new age because of its gentle accessibility, the Windham Hill sound is actually quite sophisticated, involving complex fingerstyle arrangements that often leverage nonstandard and unusual tunings.

Patterned after the Windham Hill sound, **Example 9** demonstrates a few typical characteristics in a Dsus2 tuning, like DADGAD, but with string 3 tuned down a minor third (low to high: D A D E A D). The last bass note in measure 1 and the first bass note of the following bar should be played by simply tapping the note with the fretting hand to create a different texture.

Hedges in particular employed an array of novel techniques to support his compositions, including percussive effects, slap harmonics, double-handed tapping, and string damping. Don Ross, and later Andy McKee, further developed these techniques, launching a percussive fingerstyle approach that revealed new sonic possibilities inherent to the guitar.

Players like Kaki King, Christie Lenée, Jon Gomm, and Alexandr Misko have developed percussive techniques even further, using highly choreographed hand movements to produce layers of sound from a single guitar. **Example 10** shows how to apply some typical percussive techniques in DADGAD tuning, with snare, tom, and kick drum effects created by tapping the guitar’s top and side, as seen in the accompanying video.

A WORLD OF MUSIC TO EXPLORE

Andrés Segovia referred to the guitar as a small orchestra, and whether listening to a sophisticated classical piece, fingerstyle country-blues, or a contemporary percussive player, it’s easy to understand why. When playing fingerstyle, you can be the entire band. Even the simplest fingerpicking pattern produces a satisfyingly full sound, while more complex arrangements can create the illusion of multiple instruments playing together. And because the technique is applicable to any musical style, from blues to classical to jazz, the opportunities are unlimited. Fingerstyle, like the guitar itself, has the benefit of allowing beginners to produce musical sounds relatively quickly and easily, but you can also spend a lifetime exploring the technique and never exhaust the possibilities.

AC

GEARING UP FOR FINGERSTYLE

With the amount of diversity found in steel-string fingerstyle approaches, it should be no surprise that guitarists employ a wide range of instruments. Preferences for fingerstyle music include traditional classical guitars, parlors, dreadnoughts, archtops, resonators, 12-strings, and even harp guitars. For steel-string players, the OM (Orchestra Model) introduced by Martin in 1929 is a very popular choice, due to its combination of tonal balance, comfortable size, and volume.

Another popular body style is often called a small jumbo. The SJ shape, which traces its lineage back to the Gibson J-200, is larger than an OM and offers enhanced bass response. A newer style that is generally intended for fingerstyle players is the modified dread, a guitar that combines the size, power, and bass response of a dreadnought with a more rounded, comfortable shape, along with cutaways and other features popular with fingerstyle players.

As you might expect, there is a synergistic



Martin OM-28

relationship between musicians and instrument builders. Fingerstyle techniques often work better with wider string spacing, for example, and over time, guitars with 1-3/4-inch nuts have become more prevalent. Many fingerstyle guitarists look for instruments that are very responsive, have great dynamic range, and are easier to play, and guitar makers have responded accordingly. Guitars intended for fingerstyle may be built more lightly, so that they respond differently than instruments meant to withstand heavy strumming. —DY



Example 7: After "Blackbird"

G Am7 G/B C Dadd4 Em Dadd4 C G/B Am7 G/B G

Example 8: Slack-Key Style

Tuning: D G D G B D

G D7 G

Example 9: The Windham Hill Sound

Tuning: D A D E A D

D D/F# B7sus4 G6 Bm7 E5 A6 D

*Sound note by tapping indicated fret with picking-hand finger.

Example 10: Percussive Techniques

Tuning: D A D G B D

D6 F Gm Dsus4

*BD = bass/kick drum effect; SD = snare; HT = high tom; LT = low tom

**T = tap; SH = slap harmonic

Layer Upon Layer

Using a looper to create evocative soundscapes on acoustic guitar

BY HIROYA TSUKAMOTO

In teaching fingerstyle guitar workshops, I've noticed that many players own loopers, or looping pedals—electronic devices capable of recording and layering music to build instant soundscapes—but few have fully explored their exciting sonic possibilities.

When used properly, a looper can transform the sound of your acoustic guitar into something new and beautiful, while making your performances more dynamic. It is also a great tool for learning and understanding the structure of music and orchestration, as you can hear different layers at the same time.

In this lesson, I'll share some pointers I've learned through using looping pedals as a guitarist-composer, both in terms of gear and concept, focusing on three key topics: timing, contrast, and arrangement.

1 CHOOSE YOUR LOOPER AND SETUP

There are a wide variety of loopers on the market, from relatively simple pedals such as the BOSS RC-1 Loop Station and TC Electronic Ditto X4 Looper to larger, fancy ones that have many different functions, such as the HeadRush Looperboard and BOSS RC-300. If you would like to start exploring looping, I'd suggest trying something basic first, so that you can get the hang of working the pedal while playing guitar. Also, as an acoustic player, I recommend using a looper with quiet controls—you don't want the audience to hear the clicking sound of a metal pushbutton switch, for example.

You can send your guitar sound through a pickup (piezo or magnetic soundhole) or microphone going into the input of the looper. In general, using a pickup will get you a clear sound that layers well. On the other hand, while a mic might provide a warmer acoustic sound, the extra information it captures can cause your layers to get muddy. When looping, I prefer a combination of a mic and magnetic pickup, which provides both warmth and clarity.

2 WORK ON YOUR TIMING

Timing is key when it comes to looping. You could have lots of cool licks and phrases

HERE'S HOW



EVAN C STEVENS

that will work well together, but if you place them incorrectly, you'll just have a big mess. Think of the first layer as the foundation of a building, above which subsequent layers are carefully placed for a structure with integrity.

It's best to think of a looping pedal as an instrument, one that takes some practice to control—you can't simply switch it on and off like you would with a delay or chorus pedal. I've noticed that, when recording or layering a loop, many students tend to push the start button a bit too early, while some press it a little too late. A loop must start squarely on the beat, though, so I recommend you practice timing thoroughly. Record a simple loop and listen back carefully to make sure that it feels rhythmically correct.

Note that some looping pedals have quantization features, allowing you to adjust the timing of a layer in relation to the beat. While this is certainly a useful function, you ideally want to have a good solid rhythm inside of you, whether playing guitar or creating a loop.

3 CREATE CONTRAST

By combining different sounds—such as long to short, low to high—your layers will be more discernable and interesting together. To

illustrate this concept, **Example 1** shows the intro to my original composition “Gemini Bridge,” comprising five layers, each with a different approach or texture.

When I composed this piece, I wrote this bass line first, because I wanted to start with a memorable part. Then I determined about how many layers I would add and what kind of content I would like to hear in each. Using techniques like palm muting in the outer parts and tremolo strumming in the third layer helped keep the layers distinct.

Another thing to consider: When using a looper, it is especially important not to over-play on the guitar. The more space you use in one layer, the less space you'll have in other parts, and things can get murky quickly. In other words, using silence effectively is the key for good looping.

4 THINK COMPOSITIONALLY

Looping is fun and it can be tempting just to keep layering sounds and jamming. That is totally fine, but if you want the best results, you need to think musically and compositionally, with an understanding of how your song wants to be heard.

As with anything in music, it's important not to overuse a looping pedal, as it can make your music too predictable. For this reason, I'd caution against using a looper in every section of a song—again, it's all about contrast. If you've written a song that you would like to play using a looping pedal, I would recommend thinking of the bigger picture: Jot down

the song's structure and choose a section where the looper would be most appropriate.

For instance, in "Gemini Bridge," I try to maintain a good balance between the sections with and without the looping pedal. While the intro and B sections are built from layered loops, the A section and interlude are played without the looper. You can attract listeners'

attention by switching between layers of sound and quiet solo acoustic parts.

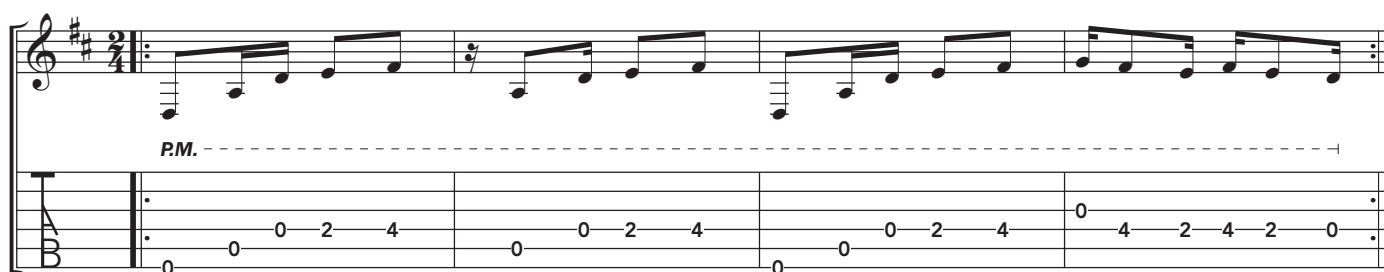
I hope this lesson will inspire you to grab a looper and explore these concepts on your own.

Hiroya Tsukamoto is a fingerstyle guitarist and singer-songwriter from Kyoto, Japan.
hiroyatsukamoto.com

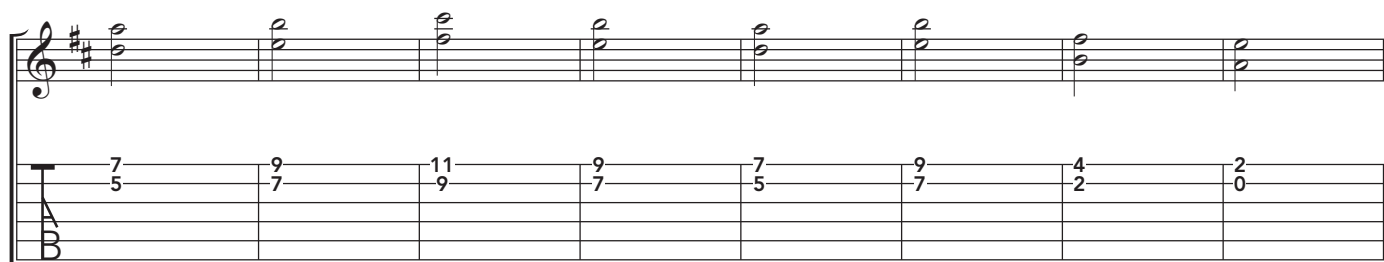
DADGAD tuning

Example 1

Layer 1



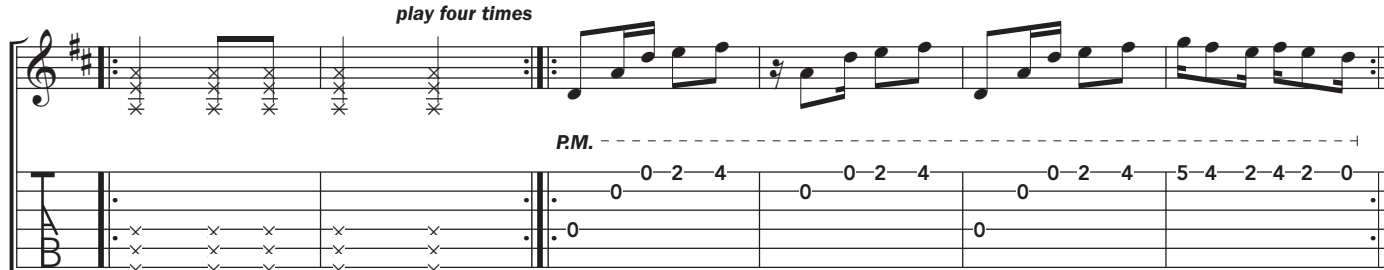
Layer 2



Layer 3

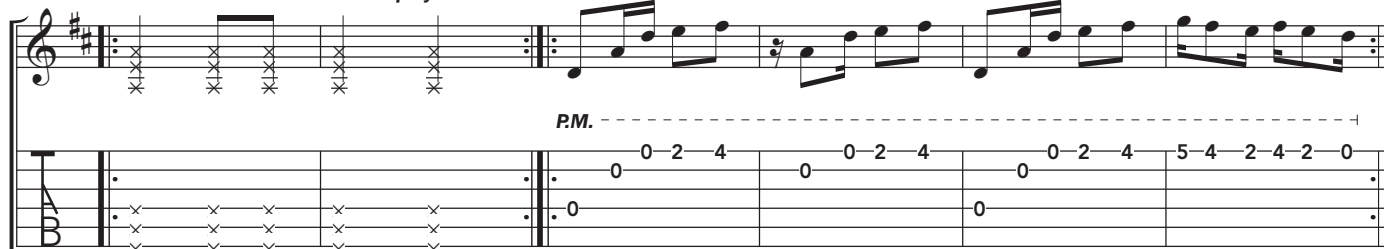


Layer 4



Layer 5

play four times



Play Like a Legend

Borrowing chord-melody ideas from jazz guitar great Eddie Lang

BY GREG RUBY

THE PROBLEM:

You have learned some rudimentary chord-melody concepts and want to add to this foundation.

THE SOLUTION:

Borrow ideas from jazz great Eddie Lang for some new techniques and textures, then apply them to the verse of the old standard "After You've Gone."

1 TRY SOME BASS RUNS

Eddie Lang is considered the father of jazz guitar. As heard on his pioneering recordings from the 1920s till his untimely death in 1933, Lang's unique approach combined elements like bass runs, inversions, diminished passages, and arpeggiated picking, all of which you'll explore in this lesson.

In previous installments, we've explored ways to maintain momentum by adding passing chords or using tremolo. A similar strategy is connecting phrases with bass runs. Start with **Example 1**, and be sure to use the suggested fingerings. Note the use of the open strings for the Em chord, making it easy to shift to the descending bass line on the "and" of beat 3.

2 UP YOUR CHORD GAME

Up until now, these lessons have focused on using inversions on the top four strings, but it's helpful to be able to do the same on the middle four strings. **Example 2** demonstrates four inversions for a C7 chord (C E G B \flat). Try playing these shapes based on other root notes as well, as they are essential voicings for playing in the chord-melody style.

Because diminished seventh chords are constructed entirely of minor thirds, the notes in one chord are shared by three others. For instance, a C \sharp dim7 (C \sharp E G B \flat) is also Edim7 (E G B \flat C \sharp), Gdim7 (G B \flat C \sharp E), and Bdim7 (B \flat C \sharp E G). (Alternatively, all of these chords can be seen as inversions of Em7.) Moving a single diminished shape by three frets causes the same four notes to become reordered, as



THE BASICS

shown in **Example 3**. After you've worked through this figure, try **Example 4**, which shows a diminished-chord scale. Use your fourth finger for the notes on string 2, while maintaining the same chord shape from inversion to inversion.

3 MIX UP YOUR PICKING APPROACH

Even though chord-melody arrangements tend to focus on the fretting fingers and harmonic possibilities, the picking hand plays an important role as well. In the Eddie Lang-inspired **Example 5**, the fretting hand holds down a basic third-fret G chord while the picking hand adds eighth-note triplets, for a bit of rhythmic panache. Try picking the passage as written, with downstrokes throughout; use alternate picking; or experiment with your own picking patterns. After you're comfortable with Ex. 5, apply the pattern to other chord types and voicings as well.

4 TIE IT ALL TOGETHER

Now apply the techniques at work to a chord-melody arrangement of the original

verse of "After You've Gone," as depicted in **Example 6**. In bars 2–3, the root of the D9 chord (D) connects to the third of the G chord (B) via a chromatic bass run; a similar move is used to connect the D9 and B7 chords in measures 4–5.

Bar 13 arrives at a C \sharp dim7 chord on the middle four strings, while beats 3 and 4 of that measure put into practice the diminished chord-scale concept introduced in Ex. 4. Lastly, the eighth-note triplet picking patterns can be found in bars 12 and 16, on C6 and G chords, respectively.

After you've learned this verse/introduction to "After You've Gone," try incorporating Eddie Lang's techniques in your own arrangements. It'll help keep things interesting every time.

Greg Ruby is a guitarist, composer, historian, and teacher specializing in jazz from the first half of the 20th century. His latest book is The Oscar Alemán Play-Along Songbook Vol. 1. Ruby teaches Zoom lessons and classes. For more information, visit gregrubymusic.com.



Example 1

Chord diagrams for Example 1:

- B7**: xx1211, 7 fr.
- F#7**: xx1324, 4 fr.
- B7**: xx1112, 4 fr.
- Em**: xx1003
- B7**: xx1203
- Em**: xxx000

Fingerings for Example 1:

7	6	5	3	2	0
7	5	4	0	0	0
8	6	4	0	2	0
6	7	4	2	1	7

Example 2

Chord diagrams for Example 2:

- C7**: x1314x
- x2314x**: 5 fr.
- x2314x**: 9 fr.
- x2413x**: 12 fr.
- C#dim7**: x2314x
- Edim7**: x1314x, 6 fr.
- Gdim7**: x2314x, 9 fr.
- Bbdim7**: x2314x, 12 fr.

Fingerings for Example 2:

5	8	11	13	5	8	11	14
3	5	9	12	3	6	9	12
5	8	10	14	5	8	11	14
3	7	10	13	4	7	10	13

Example 3

Chord diagrams for Example 3:

- C7**: x1314x
- x2314x**: 5 fr.
- x2314x**: 9 fr.
- x2413x**: 12 fr.
- C#dim7**: x2314x
- Edim7**: x1314x, 6 fr.
- Gdim7**: x2314x, 9 fr.
- Bbdim7**: x2314x, 12 fr.

Fingerings for Example 3:

5	8	11	13	5	8	11	14
3	5	9	12	3	6	9	12
5	8	10	14	5	8	11	14
3	7	10	13	4	7	10	13

Example 4

Chord diagrams for Example 4:

- C#dim7**: x2314x
- Edim7**: x1314x, 6 fr.
- Gdim7**: x2314x, 9 fr.
- Bbdim7**: x2314x, 12 fr.
- G**: 134211

Fingerings for Example 4:

5	7	8	10	11	13	14
3	6	9	12	14	12	14
5	8	11	14	14	14	14
4	7	10	13	13	13	13

Example 5

Chord diagrams for Example 5:

- C#dim7**: x2314x
- Edim7**: x1314x, 6 fr.
- Gdim7**: x2314x, 9 fr.
- Bbdim7**: x2314x, 12 fr.
- G**: 134211

Fingerings for Example 5:

5	7	8	10	11	13	14
3	6	9	12	14	12	14
5	8	11	14	14	14	14
4	7	10	13	13	13	13

Example 6

"After You've Gone" verse

Chord diagrams for Example 6:

- G**: xx3211
- A7**: xx1211, 5 fr.
- D9**: xx1333
- G**: xx3211
- A7**: xx1211, 5 fr.
- D9**: xx1333

Fingerings for Example 6:

3	5	3	5	5	7	5	3	5	5	7	5	3	5	5	7	5
4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5

B7 **F#7** **B7** **Em** **B7** **Em** **A7** **E7** **A7**
 xx1211 7 fr. xx1324 4 fr. xx1112 4 fr. xx1003 xx1203 xxx000 xx1211 5 fr. xx1324 xx1112

5

7 6 5 3 2 0 5 4 3

7 5 4 0 0 0 5 3 2

8 6 4 0 2 0 6 4 2

7 4 4 2 1 0 5 2 2

6 7 6 5 4

D7 **A7** **D7** **G** **A7** **D9**
 x1314x 5 fr. x2314x 6 fr. x2314x 7 fr. x3421x 3 fr. xx3211 xx1333

8

7 8 10 3 3 5 3 3 5 3 5 5 7 5

5 6 7 5 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

7 7 10 4 5 4 5 5 5 5 5 4 7 5 4

5 7 9 5 3 5 5 5 5 5 4 7 5 4

3

G9 **G7** **G9** **C6** **C#dim7** **Edim7**
 xx1214 xx1324 5 fr. xx1214 x42310 x1314x x1314x 6 fr.

11

5 7 5 3 0 2 3 5 7 8 5

3 6 3 2 1 5 3 5 7 6 5

4 7 4 2 2 3 5 3 5 8 8

3 5 3 3 2 4 4 4 7 7

3 2 2 2 1 3 2 3 4 7

G6 **E7** **A9** **D9** **D7** **G**
 xx1314 5 fr. xx1423 02314x x01214 5 fr. x2133x x3241x 134211

14

7 3 3 7 5 3 5 5 3 3 4 3

5 3 3 6 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

7 4 1 5 4 4 4 4 4 4 5 5

5 2 2 0 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

0 2 2 0 3 5 5 5 5 5 5 5



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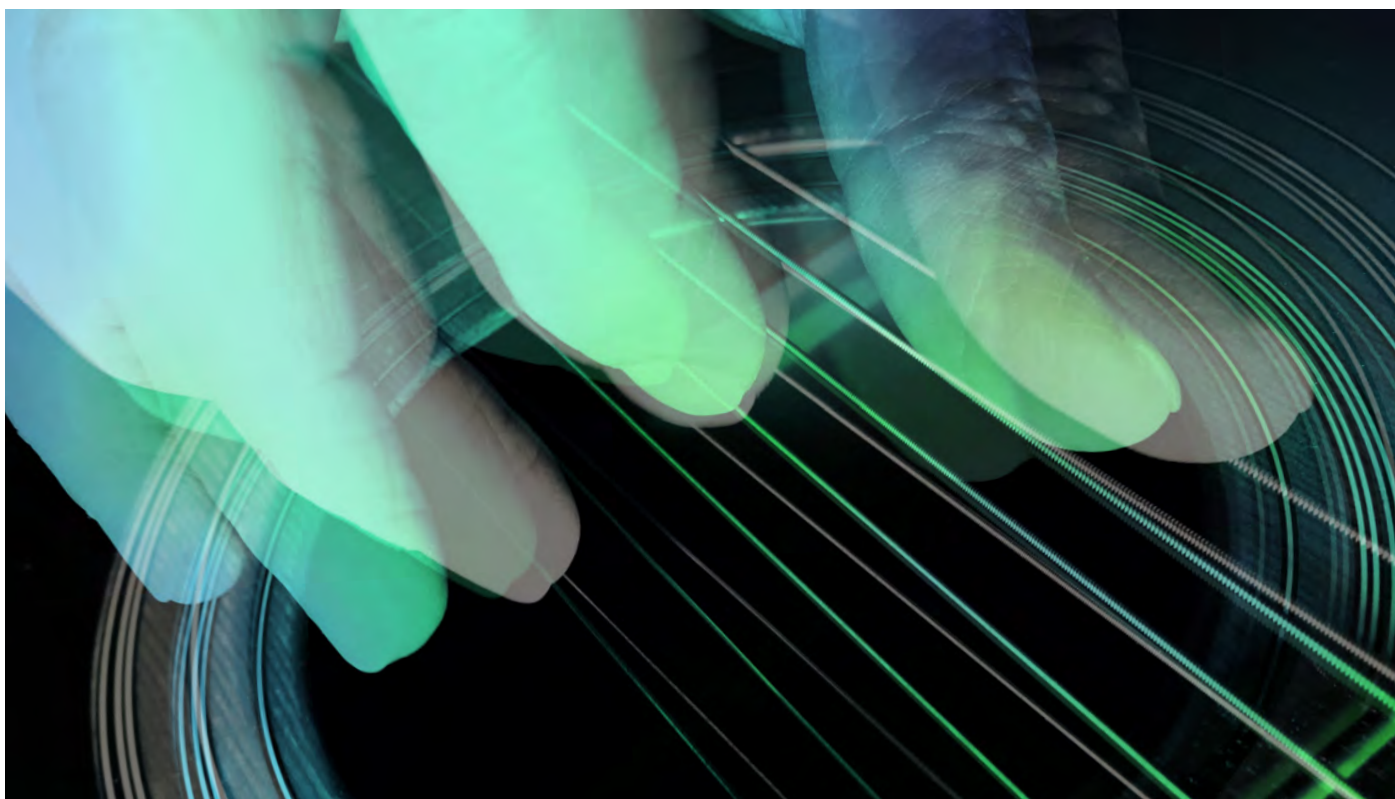


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BILL EVANS

Instant Composition

Conceptual and technical exercises for fingerstyle improvisation

BY JOHN W. WARREN

Improvisation is a component of a guitarist's arsenal just as deserving of attention and practice as performance, composition, and arranging. But it is somewhat conceptual and ephemeral, and can therefore be challenging to teach and learn. However, with a few strategies and exercises, you can develop the right frame of mind to begin improvising confidently.

This Weekly Workout will help you develop your frame of mind and confidence in solo fingerstyle improvisation. The focus is not on soloing over an accompaniment or ensemble backdrop, although the lesson's concepts can certainly improve those skills as well. We'll explore improv via "Etude in E minor," by the

Romantic-era guitarist-composer Francisco Tárrega (1852–1909), progressively adding some spontaneity and developing ways to improvise from scratch.

These examples are designed for guitarists of varying skill levels and abilities, although some familiarity with the geography of the fretboard will be helpful. Working on the skills in the woodshed will boost improvising during performance, and ideally will lead to new breakthroughs in both composition and arranging as well. Let's get started!

WEEK ONE

Begin the first week by familiarizing yourself with "Etude in E Minor," as shown in **Example 1**. Although associated with the classical guitar tradition, this study also sounds wonderful on steel-string acoustic and provides ample potential for improvisation. It's not necessary to already be able to play it flawlessly; in fact, I recommend beginning to improvise on this or any other piece while you're still becoming familiar with its nuances.

Play through the etude a few times. Listen carefully, paying particular attention to the colors and voices. What pitches and chords are you hearing? Which chords are definite, which chords are implied, and what voices might fall in between different chords? Obviously, the piece is in E minor. In the first measure, the notes are members of an E minor triad (E G B); in the following bar, you have Am7 (A C E G) and Am6 (A C E F#) chords; and so on.

Analyze the remainder of the piece in similar fashion, and don't worry if you're not strong on theory. The main idea is to use your ear and hear the different chords that are present. Before moving on to the next week, try playing some of the arpeggios as block chords. Listen to

Beginners' Tip #1

Feel free to use any song that you are relatively familiar with to explore improvisation. Start with a piece in a guitar-friendly key like E or A major or minor.

Beginners' Tip #2

When improvising, don't worry if you hit "wrong" notes here and there—it's all part of the process.

WEEKLY WORKOUT

the notes in your mind, individually and together, and try to recognize and appreciate how each pitch relates to the others.

WEEK TWO

This week, we'll continue our exploration of the etude by adding embellishments and rhythmic variety. I've provided some examples that are meant to serve as launching points. Needless to say, the very nature of improvisation is spontaneity, so work to free your mind (and your fingers) as you progress through these figures and concepts.

In **Example 2**, you'll be adding some slurs and a bit of rhythmic variety to the first part (bars 1–8 of Ex. 1). Play through the part several times before continuing with the same approach on your own, extending through the second section (measures 9–16 of Ex. 1). I've provided suggestions to get you started (**Example 3a**).

Next, perform the study as written, but adding embellishments and rhythmic variations within the repeat of each section. Play the repeat section freely. And don't be anxious about altering a classical work such as the etude. To paraphrase what guitarist Dušan Bogdanović, a dazzling improviser, once told

me, at best improvisation is as structured as composition, and composition is as fresh and inspired as improvisation.

Tárrega's etude, as with many others, concentrates the melody on the first three strings, and our embellishments and variations up until now have focused on these higher strings. In **Example 4**, we'll shift the melodic focus to the bass strings. Once again, think of these as examples designed to ignite your own explorations. Keep working on the etude, exploring different melodic variations on both the treble and bass strings.

WEEK THREE

Improvising is a different use of the mind than practicing or playing a piece that you've been working on and memorizing. It can be helpful to find a section within a piece that you can use as a launching point into improvisation, such as the break between sections in Tárrega's etude. **Example 5** explores voicings that add a bit of color and ambiguity. You can play these chord voicings, or variations of them, in different areas; pay attention to how the timbre, and with it the possibilities for embellishment, changes as you move around the fretboard.

Next, once again play the etude as written, adding a bit of variation after the first repeat, and then use Ex. 5, or other voicings that are pleasing to you, as a foundation for improvisation. Allow yourself to wander a bit and get lost in the moment. Improv involves a bit of risk, and a leap into the beyond, with dissonance often welcome.

One approach is to collect odd or ambiguous chords, either as you improvise or as you learn different pieces. **Example 6** provides a few examples. Explore different shapes, positions, and alterations. Keep a notebook or use your

smartphone to record moments as you discover them, chords that open tonal possibilities, that are neither commonplace nor fully dissonant. Utilize these in unique combinations as you improvise.

WEEK FOUR

You might have noticed that there's no notation for this week, so that you can focus on what you're hearing in your mind's ear, rather than get distracted by the printed page. This time, instead of improvising on Ex. 1, work on a spontaneous prelude, either as a standalone creation, or as a spontaneous introduction to the Tárrega etude. Use the voicings in Ex. 6 or some of the other harmonies that resonate with you to begin an improvisation.

See where it goes; try not to be self-judgmental. Use this approach throughout the week. How does this differ from an improvisation within the piece, or at the end? Don't expect transcendence every time. The measure of a good improvisation is for it to be Zen-like, harmonious, and not timeworn; it doesn't always happen, but when it works, it's magical.

John W. Warren is a guitarist, composer, and publisher in the Washington, D.C. area.
johnwwarren.com

Beginners' Tip #3

Unusual chord voicings are excellent source materials for improvisation. Explore the full fretboard for different tonal possibilities, and collect them like seashells.

Beginners' Tip #4

Try improvising an intro or outro to a basic folk tune, keeping the melody or chord progression in your mind's ear throughout.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Playing in a nonstandard tuning and seeing where it leads can be a great way to explore improvisation. Reading through the Weekly Workout in the July/August 2021 issue, on blues riffs in DADGAD tuning, led me into a great improvisation, including plenty of interesting chords like shown in the example below.

DADGAD tuning

The image shows musical notation for DADGAD tuning. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line with triplets and single notes. Below the treble staff are three bass staves labeled T, A, and B, representing the strings of the guitar. The T staff has fret numbers 0, 3, 5, 7, 0, 2, 3, 0, 0. The A staff has fret numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 0, 2, 3, 0, 0, 0, 0. The B staff has fret numbers 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6. The notation is a transcription of an improvisation, showing how the non-standard tuning leads to unique chordal and melodic possibilities.



Example 3

Example 4

WEEK 3

Example 5

Example 6



Happy Traum at home in Woodstock



JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

ACOUSTIC CLASSIC

Worried Blues

Happy Traum's dropped-D fingerpicking take on a lonesome blues

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Last summer, when Happy Traum first received his brand-new Santa Cruz HT/13 signature model (reviewed on page 70), he posted a video introducing the instrument and picking an old favorite song: "Worried Blues," a variant of traditional songs like "Chilly Winds" and "Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad."

Traum learned "Worried Blues" some 60 years ago from a record called *Hally Wood Sings Texas Folk Songs*. Wood was a song collector as well as performer who worked with John and Alan Lomax on transcribing field recordings, and sang with Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and others in the New York folk scene of the 1940s. She played frailing banjo on "Worried Blues," and Traum loosely adapted her rendition to fingerpicking guitar in dropped-D tuning (capoed at the second fret to sound in E). Bob Dylan picked up "Worried Blues" from the same source; his 1962 recording, also fingerpicked but played with C shapes (capo 3), can be heard on *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 1–3*.

Traum recorded "Worried Blues" for his 1976 solo album, *Relax Your Mind* (the track also appears on the compilation *Bucket of Songs*). "It's one of those lonesome blues things, but it's not a standard 12-bar blues," he says. "It's more like a folk song."

This transcription is based on Traum's recent video (see AcousticGuitar.com) and shows the song's instrumental intro and one of the solos. The thumb drives the arrangement throughout, with an alternating bass that varies in only a few spots.

In the intro, play the melody on the upper strings while you keep the bass steady on the sixth, fifth, and fourth strings. On D, shift between fifth position (as in the first two measures) and open position. On G, fret the sixth string, fifth fret, with your third finger so your first can fret the D notes on the second string. At the end of the intro, bars 20–22, strum the treble strings lightly with your fingers over half notes in the bass before

resuming the alternating bass picking pattern with the vocal.

Traum's first solo break is similar to the intro, but in the second solo, transcribed here, he departs more from the melody and the alternating bass. In bars 25–26, play a ragtime-y double-stop riff, and then switch to a monotonic bass (bars 27–28) while you play a quick melodic line on the treble strings. In bars 32–34, play an extended bass run, alternating your thumb and index finger for picking speed.

In the tag, go back and forth between G and D—two bars each—as in bars 23–34, before wrapping up with one final repeat of "I've got those worried blues."

Once you've got the basics of this arrangement under your fingers, try making up your own licks and embellishments. "Because of the dropped D and because it's so basically simple," says Traum, "you can just add stuff to it that's fun to do."

AC

WORRIED BLUES

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY HAPPY TRAUM

Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo II

Intro

The musical score for 'Worried Blues' is written for guitar and bass in D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The arrangement is by Happy Traum. The piece begins with an 'Intro' section. The guitar part is written on a treble clef staff, and the bass part is on a bass clef staff. Fret numbers are indicated below the notes. Chord labels (D, G, A7) are placed above the corresponding measures. The score is divided into five systems, each containing a guitar staff and a bass staff. The first system (measures 1-4) is labeled 'Intro' and features a D chord. The second system (measures 5-8) also features a D chord. The third system (measures 9-12) features an A7 chord. The fourth system (measures 13-16) features a G chord. The fifth system (measures 17-20) features a D chord. The piece concludes with a final D chord in the fifth system.

WORRIED BLUES

Solo

23 **D** **G7**

3 2 0 3 0 3 0 1 0 3 0 1 0 3 0 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 0 0 0 4 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

27 **D** **G**

3 7 5 7 5 5 1/4 6 5 1/4 0 3 0 2 0 3 0 2

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

31 **D** **G7**

3 4 2 4 2 3 3 0 2 0 3 2 0 0 0 4/5 2 0 2/4

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

35 **D** **A7**

3 2 3 0 0 1 2 5 2 3 2 2 0 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2 2 0 2 0 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

39 **D**

0 2 2 3 0 0 0 2 3 3 2 0 3 2 3

0 0 0 0 4 2 4 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0



Intro (on verse progression)

1. **D**
I got the worried blues, Lord
G **D**
I got those worried blues
A7
I got those worried blues, oh my Lord
D
I got those worried blues, Lord
G **D**
I got trouble on my mind

2. **D**
Honey baby, don't leave me now
G **D**
Honey baby, don't leave me now
A7
Honey babe, don't leave me now, oh my Lord
D
Honey baby, don't leave me now
G **D**
I got trouble on my mind

Solo 1

3. **D**
Goin' where the chilly winds don't blow
G **D**
Goin' where the climate suits my clothes
A7
Goin where the orange blossoms grow, oh my Lord
D
Goin' where the chilly winds don't blow
G **D**
Goin' where I never been before

Solo 2

Repeat first verse

Tag **G** **D** *repeat till ending*

G **D**
I got those worried blues

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Old Grimes

A masterly traditional duet by
Julian Lage and Chris Eldridge

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

“Old Grimes” was an obscure fiddle tune before guitarists Julian Lage and Chris Eldridge included it on their Grammy-nominated 2017 album, *Mount Royal*. Other than appearing on a few scant recordings, it was one of those tunes you could usually only hear by coming across another musician who had learned it elsewhere. That is exactly how Eldridge found it—he picked it up from mandolinist Jesse Cobb while they were on tour in the Infamous Stringdusters, and Cobb had learned it previously from other folks he had played with. It is likely generations old; however, like most enduring fiddle tunes, its specific origins are unknown.

Lage and Eldridge’s arrangement highlights the versatility of this simple melody. Repeating the melody four times, the guitarists first play it in perfect unison, then Eldridge adds an arpeggiated backup under Lage’s lead, followed by Lage playing a more traditional rhythm under Eldridge’s solo. The tune ends with a final repeat of the melody. Instead of the typical approach of trading improvised solos over a repeated rhythm pattern, the arrangement holds the melody mostly constant while altering the backup. This technique continually pushes the song forward, resulting in an intoxicating melody line that never feels repetitive.

Example 1 (see p. 62) shows the melody and the accompanying chords. To get the most mileage, let each note ring out until the next note is played, helping create a sense of ease and fluidity. While Lage and Eldridge’s recording is astonishing, “Old Grimes” needn’t only be played in that exact arrangement—it also is a good jam tune, can be worked up as a solo arrangement, or, if nothing else, is a nice exercise to get the fingers moving in the key of D.

That being said, much of the magic on the recording comes from Eldridge’s backup the second time through. The guitarist told me his approach was to arpeggiate over open-position triads while replacing some fretted notes of each chord with open strings, resulting in airy ringing chords like Dsus2, A7sus4, and Bm(b6). When paired with Lage’s melody, this backup gives off a stunning and shimmering effect.

Chris Eldridge (left) and Julian Lage



DEVIN PEDDE

Example 2 shows the chord voicings and an approximation of the first four bars of the arpeggiation. Eldridge explained that his accompaniment is loosely improvised and that he does not play the exact same thing every time, so instead of trying to master this note for note, just use it as an example for your own arpeggiated iterations. Eldridge also incorporates some runs that add a sense of forward momentum to the backup. **Example 3** approximates a lengthy descending move, making good use of the open strings, that he uses near the end of the second time through.

Following Eldridge’s open and airy backup, Lage employs a more straightforward but no less effective accompaniment approach, a

sample of which is shown in **Example 4**. Lage is known as a jazz guitarist with an incredible command of harmony, but he opts for simpler chord shapes and a boom-chuck pattern here, firmly grounding the rhythm and harmony of the tune and clearly defining this section as separate from the ones that precede it.

Eldridge and Lage’s choice to play “Old Grimes” simply and cleanly speaks not only to the power of the tune’s melody but also to the duo’s keen musical insight. *Mount Royal* is full of dazzling, technical guitar work, but when these two world-class musicians come across a hidden gem of a fiddle tune, they let the melody speak for itself.



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TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY JULIAN LAGE AND CHRIS ELDRIDGE

$\text{♩} = 92$

Example 2

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It contains four measures of music, each with a slur over it. The bottom staff is a bass clef and contains four measures of fingerings, each with a slur over it. The first measure of the bottom staff has a '2' under the first line and a '3' under the second line. The second measure has a '0' under the first line and a '2' under the second line. The third measure has a '3' under the first line and a '2' under the second line. The fourth measure has a '2' under the first line and a '2' under the second line. The fifth measure has a '0' under the first line and a '3' under the second line. The sixth measure has a '0' under the first line and a '0' under the second line. The seventh measure has a '2' under the first line and a '4' under the second line. The eighth measure has a '4' under the first line and a '0' under the second line. The ninth measure has a '0' under the first line and a '0' under the second line. The tenth measure has a '0' under the first line and a '2' under the second line. The eleventh measure has a '3' under the first line and a '0' under the second line. The twelfth measure has a '0' under the first line and a '3' under the second line. The system ends with the text 'etc.'.

etc.



Example 3

Example 4

Chord diagrams for Example 4:

- D**: xx0132
- A**: x01230
- Bm**: x1342x
- G**: 2x000x
- A**: x01230

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House of the Rising Sun

How to strum along with a classic cautionary tale

BY MAURICE TANI

The term “campfire song” is generally used to refer to a familiar old song that folks can sing along with to a simple guitar accompaniment. But the tunes we cover in this series extend beyond the repertoire of well-fed cowboys on the open range. Regardless of whether you’re indoors or out, or how you cook your dinner, we call them campfire songs. As a singer-songwriter, I find learning these tunes and their history very interesting.

This selection, “House of the Rising Sun,” is cautionary tale of things gone wrong in New Orleans. Made popular by a rock version that the Animals recorded in 1964, it has been a staple in folk music stretching back to at least the beginning of the 20th century, with roots in much older European folk traditions. While the basic

melody was nailed down pretty early, the accompanying chords have seen a lot of variations along the way. The earliest recordings of the song—like Clarence Ashley and Gwen Foster’s 1933 “Rising Sun Blues” and Woody Guthrie’s version from 1941—were generally in Appalachian folk or bluesy styles. Among my favorite other interpretations are Josh White’s brooding solo take and Ronnie Gilbert’s jazzy three-piece arrangement with the Weavers.

As always with the songs in this series, we’ll keep the arrangement simple and stick with chords in open and first position: Am, then C with a G in the bass, D with an F# in the bass, and F (fretted with a full barre), which creates a neat descending bass pattern (A, G, F#, F). The only other chords are basic open C and E shapes.



Maurice Tani

The song is in 6/8 time—that’s six eighth notes per bar, counted, “One, two, three, four, five, six.” If you are not familiar with this meter, play along with the video to get a good sense of how it feels. I like to play the song with a flatpick, mixing things up with strums and single notes, as transcribed in the first eight measures. You could keep things even simpler and go with straight strumming throughout, or use a basic fingerpicking pattern—whatever works best for you. **AG**

HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY MAURICE TANI

Intro/Strumming Pattern

Chord diagrams for the Intro/Strumming Pattern:

- Am**: x02310
- C/G**: 3x2010
- D/F#**: 2x034x
- F**: T34211
- Am**: x02310

Verse

Chord diagrams for the Verse:

- E**: 023100
- Am**: x02310
- E**: 023100
- Am**: x02310
- C/G**: 3x2010

1., 6. There is a house in

Chord diagrams for the Verse:

- D/F#**
- F**
- Am**
- C**
- E**



11

D/F# 2x034x **F** T34211 **Am** x02310 **C** x32010 **E** 023100

New Or - leans _____ they call _____ the Ris - ing Sun.

0 0 0 0 2 2 0 0 2

16

Am x02310 **C/G** 3x2010 **D/F#** 2x034x **F** T34211

And it's been _____ the ru - in _____ of _____ man - y a _____ poor boy and

2 2 2 2 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 3 1 0

21

Am x02310 **E** 023100 **Am** x02310 **E** 023100

God _____ I know _____ I'm one. _____ 2. My

0 0 4 0 0 2 0 2

2. My mother was a tailor
She sewed my new blue jeans
My father was a gambling man
Down in New Orleans

3. Now the only thing a gambler needs
Is a suitcase and a trunk
And the only time that he's satisfied
Is when he's on a drunk

4. So, mother, tell your children
Not to do what I have done
Spend your lives in sin and misery
In the House of the Rising Sun

5. Well, I got one foot on the platform
And the other foot on the train
I'm goin' back to New Orleans
To wear that ball and chain

Out of the Redwoods

Maegen Wells builds next-level archtop guitars in her Northern California workshop

BY KATE KOENIG

It was around the time that Maegen Wells graduated high school that she realized making guitars was her calling in life. She'd been a guitar player since the age of seven, had always been interested in hands-on projects, and had discovered a love for woodworking in school. Upon graduation, those worlds all came together. "I don't ever say that I chose to get into guitar making," she says. "I felt like I was surrendering to a mission."

Wells, who is now in her early 30s, works out of her shop in Forestville, California, building compact archtops—she doesn't go any wider than a lower bout of 16.5 inches, and most of her orders are for 15-inch models—as well as the occasional mandolin. She's built custom guitars for players as diverse as Mark Goldenberg, Jamie Stillway, and K-pop star Sam Kim. "The reason I started making small-body instruments is the same reason behind most of the choices I make as a guitar builder," she says. "It's because that's what I wanted as a musician. Then it turned out that everybody else did, too."

Wells' custom builds go for \$10,500, and the luthier keeps a waitlist, comprised of six orders, that opens up just once a year, in early October. Her most recent list sold out in 24 hours, making 2021 her best year to date as a builder.

GREEN WOOD

Wells first felt a calling to the craft in 2005 and began formally studying it the follow year, when she enrolled at the Galloup School of Guitar Building and Repair in Michigan. At Galloup, making an archtop—an instrument she'd never even played—was the final assignment. When she began working on the guitar, she fell in love, not just as a builder but as a musician.

"Everybody had always told me that I didn't play the right kind of music for an archtop," says Wells, formerly a singer-songwriter in the mold of Lisa Loeb and Ani DiFranco. "But when the guitar was completed, I discovered this instrumental music inside of me that no other guitar had really been able to pull out."

After graduating from Galloup in 2007, Wells worked first for Reverend, an electric guitar company in Detroit, and then for a flattop

Maegen Wells



MAKERS & SHAKERS

SARPY PHOTOS

builder in West Virginia. But her most important training started in 2009, when she embarked on a five-year apprenticeship in Northern California with the master archtop luthier Tom Ribbecke, from whom she learned the ins and outs of archtop construction. She says, "When I got to his shop, it was like I had arrived," adding that she founded a workshop of her own in 2012 while still working for Ribbecke.

MEASURING TWICE

From the beginning, Wells had a mission that set her apart—making small-body archtops. She's always allowed what she's wanted as a player to guide her building, and when she started her shop, that meant guitars that could fit snugly in her arms. She soon found that she wasn't the only one. "Men and women of all sizes were saying, 'Yeah, my shoulders hurt. I want something that fits more comfortably,'" she says.

It's commonly assumed that the larger the archtop, the louder the sound, but Wells has found this to be a misconception. "People think that you need this big box to get a big sound out of an archtop guitar, and that's just not true," she says. "A lot of my clients have other archtops that are much larger, but my guitars sound twice as big as those 17- or 18-inch guitars."

Unlike many guitar builders, Wells does her own finishes, with a knack for color and for

beautifully subtle sunbursts. She's always worked with nitrocellulose lacquer, and, laughing, admits she's afraid to try anything else since it's the only thing she knows. In the construction process, if there's an issue, Wells can usually recover from it quickly. But in the finishing stage, she finds that there's endless opportunity for failure. "It's the only part where in a second you can be launched back two weeks," she says.

Wells once accidentally pulled a chunk of color off of a guitar she was working on when she touched it with an arm that was inflamed with poison oak. Sometimes, she'll be applying lacquer and something random will spit out of the spray gun. When unplanned events like these happen, Wells has to pause to put a game plan together. "If that means stripping the finish off of that guitar that you loved and doing it again, then you do it," she says. "By working through failure after failure, they turn into beautiful successes."

LIVING LUMBER

It would be difficult to run your own custom guitar shop without having inspiration for your craft. And speaking with Wells, it's clear that she's overflowing with it. But it's not just the guitars that inspire her—a lot of it comes from the wood itself, and her tools. To her, both might as well be living and breathing.

“My favorite part of building guitars is when I get to gather the materials,” she says. “I go into my wood room and start pulling pieces down, and I let the materials say, ‘Hi, it’s me!’ It speaks to you, and you get this vision when you’re holding this raw material in your hand—that was a life; there was a whole industry of processes that happened in between that life and it being in my wood room.”

Archtop luthiers have typically used maple for backs, sides, and necks, along with spruce for soundboards. But Wells prefers to branch out. Since she grew up playing flattops, she prefers mahogany necks. She might build a guitar with a flamed maple back and a spruce top, but throw off expectations with rosewood sides. Wells says that she is completely obsessed with West African ebony, which she uses not just for fretboards but all of her hardware—tailpieces, bridges, and pickguards—sometimes with carbon-fiber reinforcement for added structural integrity. Plus, her tailpiece features an ebony hinge, a design she credits to Ribbecke.

In terms of tools, Wells loves her hand planes more than anything. “When you’ve got a properly set-up plane, you can magically cut through a piece of hard maple like a knife through butter,” she says. “The tools really are my communication line between the wood and myself. I can’t take credit for this work. The tools are the ones doing the job, not me.”

THE FIDDLEBACK TREE

Asked if there’s a particular guitar she’s made that was the most special to her, Wells talks about the privilege of working with a rare and beautifully figured wood from the Fiddleback Tree, harvested by Hibdon Hardwood in southern Mexico in 2016. The yield included 390 guitar sets, only ten of them suitable for carved archtop backs. Wells says, “I bought six of them!”

The luthier’s plan is to build one Fiddleback Tree guitar every five years until she has run out of this special tonewood. She finished the first when she was 30. “This material is going to represent my evolution as a builder,” she says. “There are only going to be ten archtops in the whole world made out of it—and six of them will be mine.”

MINIATURE MAGIC

Over the years, Wells’ passion for archtops has extended to the mandolin. After coming across a 1921 Gibson A-2 at Tall Toad Music in Petaluma, California, she found herself discovering yet another unexpected musical connection. In 2014 she began building mandolins and has found that this offers a nice reprieve from crafting guitars. She says,

“Mandolins are undeniably cute, and the process of making them is a miniature one. It brings a lot of joy to the shop in that way.

“That was not something I was aware of because I came to the archtop world through the back door,” she continues. “The archtop builder in me identified with the fact that those small instruments are at the root of all of this. It’s a beautiful history. You can’t read about it without being inspired.”

Wells is driven to further explore the mandolin family, going larger, while at the same time getting even smaller with her guitars. Next on her build exploration list is a mandocello, then

an octave mandolin. The narrowest archtop she’s made is 14 inches wide, and she plans to go even more diminutive—to a mere 12 inches. “I want to just keep evolving and having the courage to try new things, as well as stay true to whatever vision I have today,” she says.

But ultimately, the real reward comes from seeing her work come to life in the hands of her customers. Wells says, “Everybody has music living inside of them. To be able to sit back and watch a guitar find that music in somebody and pull it out makes me want to run right back up to the wood room and do it all over again.”

AG



“

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Getting Into Gears

All about tuning components and how to keep them moving smoothly

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: I have a 1958 Martin D-28. During a recent restringing, I noticed the tuning gears (Grover Rotomatic 102C) had all sorts of black goop inside, looking like lubricant past its service life, when I removed the tuning button from one of the gears. I'm wondering if after 63 years of good service these gears might need cleaning, relubrication, or repacking. I've read a little about it and have been warned off using Vaseline and seen that Tri-Flo Superior Dry is recommended by some. What would you use for lubrication to renovate a Rotomatic? —Bob Metzger

A: To begin, let's take a quick look at the main components of the mechanism: the "worm" gear (the spiral-shaped section that connects to the handle/button) and the pinion gear (the round part that turns the string post). Nearly all guitar tuners operate on this same mechanism, with extremely few exceptions, most notably Ned Steinberger's linear-drive "gearless" tuners and Bill Rickard's recent and very innovative design involving a cycloidal drive system.

Many vintage guitars, and the modern instruments that emulate them, will have open-back or exposed-gear tuners. As the name suggests, these tuners give an unrestricted view of the worm-and-pinion arrangement. This also means that these gears are susceptible to collecting dust, case lint, and any other particles or fluff that may happen to come along. If debris builds up in the gear teeth, it can cause sticky and unreliable tuning and potentially even gear failure. For this reason, I generally use a dry lubricant on open-back tuners, rather than a paste grease



BILL EVANS

or other sticky lubricant that could gather contaminants. I've had moderate success with powdered graphite, but lately I use Tri-Flow for open-back tuners, on the advice of the great repairman and tuner connoisseur Frank Ford. Although this dispenses as a liquid oil, it works primarily as a carrier for microparticulate PTFE (aka Teflon), which adheres to the gear surfaces and continues acting as a lubricant even after the oil itself has dried.

When lubricating open-back tuners, I generally remove the strings, which allows me to turn the tuner freely in both directions. I apply a small drop to the point of contact between worm and pinion, and then use a string winder to turn the tuner fairly quickly. After about a 1/3 turn of the pinion gear (usually three to

five turns of the handle), I apply another drop at the same contact point and repeat again after another four or five turns. Then, I turn continuously to move the pinion gear through another complete rotation. This generally leaves a nice, even layer of lubricant around the perimeter of the gear, without making too much of a mess. Keep a cotton swab on hand for any stray drops of oil that drip out.

Modern cast-body or sealed tuners are a different story. In the past, inexpensive tuners were known for low quality metal and poor manufacturing tolerances, and were frequently to blame for unstable tuning. Companies such as Grover, Schaller, and Gotoh addressed this by offering tuner upgrades with better gears, tighter tolerances, and fully enclosed bodies,

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* repair expert Martin Keith by sending an email titled "Repair Expert" to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we'll forward it to Keith.



Martin Keith



If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

which allowed the gears to turn in a bath of thick paste grease. These tuners were designed to be permanently closed, and in many cases they still perform admirably after decades of maintenance-free service. However, the small disc or plate that seals the back cover can fall out and be lost, exposing the gears within, and allowing the grease to collect contaminants.

In these cases, I will disassemble and clean the tuner as best I can. A heated ultrasonic cleaner is the preferred tool for this in my shop, but a simpler solution is a brief dip in boiling water followed by a scrub with an old toothbrush. Next comes reassembly and relubrication with a midweight grease. Blue or blue-green lithium-based greases generally work well for this, and those with added PTFE are even better, but even basic white lithium grease from the hardware store will usually be fine. I don't overpack the gearboxes—just a reasonable dollop is sufficient. Then, replace the back medallion to enclose the gearset again. If you cannot replace the medallion, consider the dry-style lubrication approach instead (as detailed for open-back tuners) using Tri-Flo.

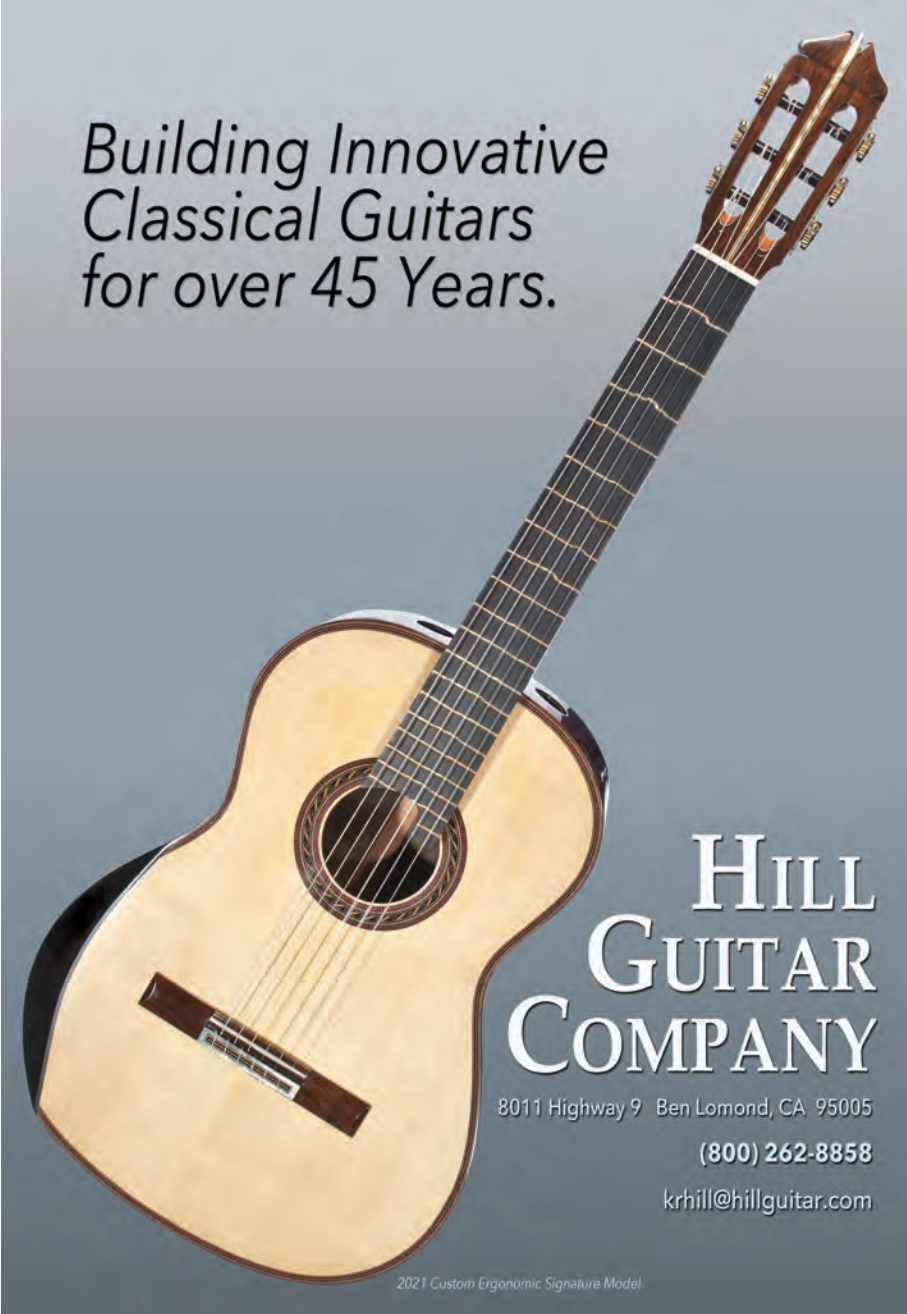
The third common family of tuners uses a stamped sheet-metal back which covers the worm and pinion. Among the brands that produced these, the best known was Kluson, whose tuners were found on Fender guitars for decades, as well as on many acoustics. These tuners often have a small hole in the back plate, which is meant to allow lubrication at the strategic point where the worm and pinion intersect. This hole can also let in a surprising amount of dust/grime, as I've discovered in some cases when I disassembled older sets. If the tuner feels a tiny bit gritty or tight, a drop of oil through the hole should be sufficient. If it feels worse than that, I usually do a thorough disassembly and cleaning.

Since we're discussing tuner maintenance, I'll also mention another very common issue that comes up with vintage tuners: rotten or cracked plastic buttons. Many vintage tuners suffer from this issue, and I've handled a number of guitars whose buttons simply cracked off when turned. This is due to long-term degradation of the plastic used for the buttons. There is no real practical fix for this other than replacing the buttons. Most supply houses, such as StewMac, sell melt-on buttons meant for this purpose. After the tuner shaft has been cleaned of all old plastic and oxidation, the tech can heat it up using a flame or soldering iron (I prefer the iron, as the flame can sometimes leave a black deposit) and press the button into place, molding the plastic around the shaft of the tuner. When everything cools, the button is solidly together.

One last note: Most tuners have a bushing (metal sleeve) that installs in the face of the guitar's headpiece to support the string post. This simply presses into place on older tuners. On newer cast-body tuners, the bushing is threaded and screws through the headpiece into the tuner housing. The press-in ones are notorious for falling out at inconvenient moments when changing strings, and can disappear under tables or into crevices very easily. (Trust me on that one!)

When working on your guitar, make sure the bushings are a tight fit, or else put a plastic bag over the headpiece so any lost parts will get

safely caught. It's also a good idea to check the bushings on modern tuners periodically—they are very often loose, and sometimes the washers beneath them can cause mysterious rattles and buzzes that are maddening to diagnose. Don't crank them too hard as it can cause problems in the surrounding finish. Simply snug them up with an open-end wrench or socket. Nearly every cast tuner around uses a 10mm wrench. When lubricating tuners, especially older open-back models with press-fit bushings, I also put a tiny drop of oil between the string post and bushing, at the 6 o'clock location where the bushing is closest to the nut. **AG**



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2021 Custom Ergonomic Signature Model

Santa Cruz Happy Traum Signature Model HT/13

The legendary roots musician inspires a new heirloom-quality 13-fret guitar

BY SEAN MCGOWAN

Beautiful. Resonant. Comfortable. Balanced. Sweet. *Loud!* These were the words that immediately came to mind as I played the Santa Cruz HT/13 guitar for the first time. Initially based on a custom H/13 model, the HT denotes legendary roots guitarist and longtime Santa Cruz devotee Happy Traum (see feature on page 16). Players and luthiers alike discuss and debate the merits of 13-fret guitars; some feel they can illuminate the best qualities of 12- and 14-fret models with regard to projection, tone, and intonation.

All I know is that this guitar checks all the sonic boxes: sonorous, piano-like clarity; evenness of tone in all registers; and a controlled responsiveness balanced with cannon-like projection. With its detailed clarity and punch, the HT/13 immediately recalls the best vintage Gibson archtops I have played, and it will give a great dreadnought a run for its money in terms of sheer projection and volume. It responds like a high-end sports car, faithfully projecting the true nuances of your playing, whether using a flatpick, thumbpick, or purely fingerstyle.

THE BACK STORY

Santa Cruz's founding luthier, Richard Hoover, has a longstanding personal and professional relationship with Happy Traum. About 13 years ago, after many years of playing various vintage dreadnoughts, Traum commissioned an H13 model with an Adirondack spruce top and cocobolo back and sides. Traum notes that he loves smaller-bodied guitars and feels they project more clearly and are much more comfortable on stage and in a room than larger models such as dreads or jumbos. He later expressed interest in an all-mahogany Santa Cruz OM, which was then crafted from Victorian furniture Hoover was able to source. The combination of woods and features from these guitars prompted Hoover to start thinking of a new collaboration.

"About a year ago, Richard asked me about doing a signature model, and of course, I was thrilled with the idea," Traum recalls. "I've always loved redwood, and Richard has an uncanny ability to source and find incredible old-growth wood from old train tunnels out West and other places." Santa Cruz then created two versions of the HT/13 model: one with Honduran mahogany back and sides and another with Brazilian





rosewood. While the standard HT/13 model currently comes with the redwood-mahogany combination, there are many custom options and upgrades that Santa Cruz Guitars offers, including tonewood choices and combinations. Traum notes, “I love the folks at Santa Cruz. It’s a small enough shop for them to really honor the integrity of building instruments for musicians, and the personal relationship that is available with a smaller business is wonderful.”

BEAUTIFUL INSIDE AND OUT

When I received and unboxed the review guitar, the first thing I noticed was the high quality Ameritage case, custom built for Santa Cruz Guitars. Featuring solid construction and quilted padding, the case elegantly meets the need for storage and road travel (though I would personally invest in a flight case for air travel with a guitar of this caliber).

The next thing I noticed was the HT/13’s handsome set of appointments—this guitar is a visual stunner. Featuring reclaimed old-growth redwood atop Honduras mahogany back and sides, it exudes a warmth and balance of aesthetics. With its 41-style ornamentation, the guitar features a striking abalone rosette and purfling, matched with a slotted peghead, contrasting ivoroid binding, and snowflake inlays on an ebony fretboard. The back and sides have a buffed tobacco finish, joined with a gorgeous

multicolored backstrip. The neck also features a matte tobacco finish, with an exceptionally smooth finish to the hand. The beauty of the rich, earthy woods—complemented with ivoroid tuning pegs and binding, plus abalone appointments and tortoise pickguard—make for a guitar that is as pleasing to look at as it is to play.

The HT/13 is surprisingly lightweight. This is a small-bodied guitar that is extremely

issue), the action and setup were perfect right out of the case.

Whether playing single-note melodies, fingerpicking arpeggios, or strumming open-voiced chords, the HT/13 responds with bell-like clarity and a note separation that is almost addictive. This quality is certainly attractive to solo players and singer-songwriters, but will also benefit those who play in a band and need to cut through the mix with definition and shape to their notes. To put it simply, the guitar plays evenly and clearly all over the neck, stays precisely in tune, and exudes a balance even when mixing open strings with fretted notes—characteristics that can help take your playing to a higher, inspired level.

THE STUFF OF DREAMS

Santa Cruz often advertises its guitars as heirloom-quality, and given my time with the HT/13, I would emphatically agree with this sentiment. The inherent qualities of this guitar easily warrant the investment aspect. A product review would typically conclude with pros and cons. The numerous pros are outlined above and throughout the accompanying video review. The cons? There are none. This is a world-class, handmade American instrument that will yield years—and generations—of pleasure and satisfaction to players of all styles and levels.

AC

The HT/13 responds like a high-end sports car, faithfully projecting the true nuances of your playing.

comfortable to play and hold, yet, the depth of its body and placement of the bridge contribute to a surprisingly big and rich tone. With a scale length of 25.375 inches, fans of OM’s will feel right at home. And with the 1-3/4-inch nut and 2-3/16-inch width at the 14th fret, the HT/13 will easily accommodate both fingerstylists and flatpickers. Outfitted with Santa Cruz’s own Parabolic Tension strings (which I reviewed in the May/June 2019

SPECS

BODY Old-growth redwood top with Adirondack scalloped/tapered bracing; Honduran mahogany back and sides; abalone rosette and purfling; ivoroid binding; tortoise pickguard; hot-hide-glue construction; buffed tobacco nitrocellulose lacquer finish

NECK Traditional V profile; 25.375" scale; 1-3/4" bone nut; slotted peghead; ebony fretboard with Happy Traum signature inlay at 18th fret; ivoroid fretboard and headstock binding; nickel Waverly tuners with ivoroid buttons; tobacco matte finish

OTHER Santa Cruz Parabolic Tension strings; deluxe Ameritage hardshell case

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CAROLYN SILLS

Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Hummingbird

A long-coveted Gibson classic sees an excellent and affordable new interpretation

BY JAMES VOLPE ROTONDI

The Hummingbird, Gibson's iconic square-shouldered dreadnought, has been the stuff of dreams for over 50 years, showing up in the hands of everyone from Keith Richards to Sheryl Crow, and a new generation seems equally intent on making it a go-to. But with its distinctive flared pickguard—depicting a floral scene and a hovering hummingbird—the guitar, new or used, has remained a fairly pricey choice.

That's what makes the new Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Hummingbird—part of a line that also includes versions of the classic J-45 and J-200, among other acoustics—so compelling. At press time, asking prices of 1960s Gibson examples on Reverb.com ranged from around \$3,250 to \$9,600. Gibson's new flagship Historic 1960 Hummingbird will set you back five grand, while the Hummingbird Original goes for \$3,849. The street price on Epiphone's Inspired By Gibson Hummingbird? Just \$799—and you get much of the vibe of its costlier Gibson counterparts, as I discovered when I put the guitar through its paces.

INSIDE THE DETAILS

The basic Hummingbird recipe, first cooked up in 1960, is not especially complex: solid Sitka spruce top; mahogany back, sides, and neck; and vibrant cherry sunburst or natural finish, all of which are identical on Epiphone's new iteration of the Hummingbird. What's different about the Epiphone Hummingbird? Not a lot. OK, the nut width is slightly slimmer than the original Gibson's 1.72 inches, but only by a fraction, at 1.69. The Epiphone's fretboard and bridge are made of Indian laurel, rather than rosewood, and, as would be expected, the guitar has a polyurethane finish, as opposed to nitrocellulose lacquer.

But the Epiphone retains many of the original Gibson details. You still have those iconic Hummingbird pickguard graphics and the awesome





mother-of-pearl split parallelogram fretboard markers. You get the cool Epiphone Deluxe tuning machines with their press-in gold bushings and Kluson-style tulip pegs. Our review model sported the Aged Antique Natural finish, a lovely muted amber with a soft patina-like effect, and the instrument is also available in the equally attractive Aged Cherry Sunburst. But it's not just another pretty six-string—the build quality on the Epi Hummingbird is excellent, with the bracing and interior tidy and tight. This is an all-solid-wood guitar and it feels like one.

HIGHLY PLAYABLE AND FINE-SOUNDING

Let's talk sound and playability. While I can't speak for every Epiphone that ships out, this one came well set-up from the factory, with a set of Gibson phosphor bronze strings (.012–.053), and played easily at virtually every position on the neck. Frankly, this was not my experience on previous iterations of the Epiphone Hummingbird before Gibson's change of guard several years ago. There has clearly been a step-up in quality control across Gibson brands.

Cowboy chords on the Hummingbird rang true and full, with a nice coppery top and plenty of balanced bottom end. Double-stops and single-note flatpicking up the neck produced a sweet character as well. The neck just feels good: There's plenty of room to move around, and there isn't abundant string squeak for some reason, either. Even big bold barre chords, bashed out with a little muscle, sound

This is an all-solid-wood guitar and it feels like one.

great on the Hummingbird. And while certainly not as rich and round as on, say, a fine Lowden, fingerpicking in a folk, blues, or British Isles fashion speaks with a bold voice as well.

Given the instrument's low price, it's understandable that Epiphone outfitted the Hummingbird with Fishman's ubiquitous Sonitone undersaddle piezo system, though I sure wish it could have come with one of the electronics

company's other excellent offerings. If you do a lot of live playing, you may want to explore other options, or consider sticking a boom mic in front of the guitar—the review model had a lot of good projection, and even the higher strings didn't lose weight through a Rode NT1-A microphone in the studio.

A SONG MACHINE

It's easy to talk about aspects like specs and build quality, but then there's that intangible with any acoustic guitar: is it a song machine? I wrote three or four new tunes within a day of receiving the Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Hummingbird; the pace has continued, and that tells me something important about the guitar.

It's an instrument you'll want to look at a whole lot—and, more significant, pick up and play often. By all means, go out and try a Gibson Hummingbird and then compare it to this fresh and lively Epiphone model. Don't even think about the price at first; just ask yourself which one gets your creative juices flying like a bird. Then smile at how the Epiphone's price tag lifts your feet off the floor just a little, too.

AG

SPECS

BODY 14-fret square-shouldered dreadnought shape; solid Sitka spruce top with quartersawn spruce bracing; solid mahogany back and sides; reverse belly Indian laurel bridge with bone saddle; top and back multi-ply binding; tortoise pickguard with Hummingbird graphics; aged gloss finish (Cherry Sunburst or Antique Natural)

NECK 24.72"-scale mahogany neck with rounded C shape; glued-in tapered dovetail joint; dual-action truss rod; 20 medium jumbo frets; Indian laurel fretboard with 12.01" radius and mother-of-pearl split parallelogram inlays; 1.69" bone nut; Epiphone Deluxe tuners with gold press-in bushings

OTHER Fishman Sonitone electronics; Gibson phosphor bronze strings (.012–.053); optional EpiLite case (\$90); left-handed available

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MusicNomad Keep It Simple, Setup

All the tools and guidance you need for adjusting your guitar

BY KATE KOENIG

For the past decade, MusicNomad has provided maintenance products for guitarists—everything from guitar polish to string-changing tools. Now, the company has introduced the Keep It Simple, Setup (KISS), a DIY kit designed with the guidance of guitar tech (and SF GuitarWorks owner) Geoff Luttrell to make guitar setups easy even for the entirely uninitiated.

Packaged in three small cases, KISS (\$159.99) comes with virtually any tool you'll need for setting up your acoustic guitar (or electric or bass guitar): a six-piece gauge setup set, 26-piece screwdriver and wrench collection, and an 11-piece truss-rod wrench assortment. Also included is an essential 24-page

booklet that walks you through the setup process in detail, having you use each of the tools in recommended order.

In addition to the kit, the manufacturer provided me with a set of six diamond-coated nut files (\$84.99) for adjusting nut-slot depth/individual string action. I tested out KISS on an old Tacoma DM14 dreadnought. First I slid the included pick capo between the E and D strings and the A string and used the truss-rod gauge to check the relief; the results led me to tighten the rod using the appropriate Allen key. Next, I used a gauge to measure the action of strings 6 and 1 at the 12th fret, which indicated that at .09 and .075 inches, they met the specifications for the desired medium action.



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Lastly, I slid another gauge between each individual string and the first fret to test the nut height for each. Because there was some extra space between the fret and the low E string, I used the appropriate nut file to sand down the slot a tiny bit, which then allowed the gauge to fit smoothly.

As someone who's had only minimal experience setting up guitars, I found MusicNomad's KISS made the process not only unintimidating, but *fun*, thanks to the range of tools and their breakdown of measurements, not to mention the detailed, intuitive guidebook. KISS makes it easy to improve your guitar's playability in subtle yet impactful ways. I highly recommend it. musicnomadcare.com

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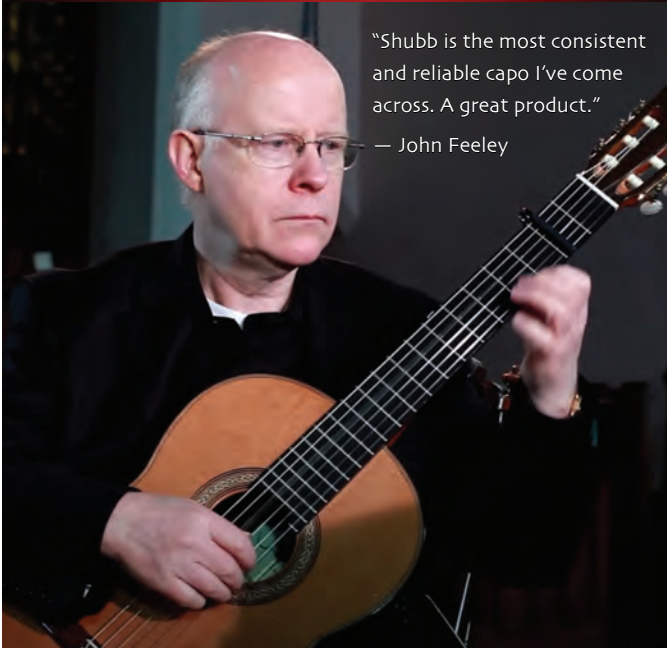
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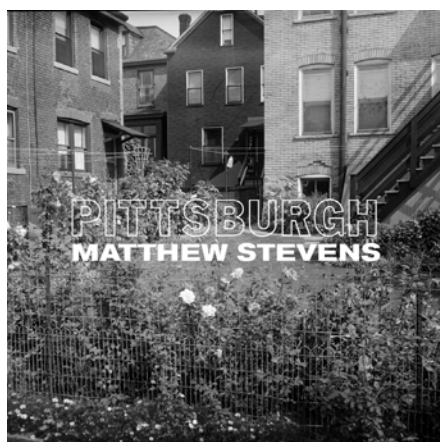
PLAYLIST



John Pizzarelli

Better Days Ahead (Solo Guitar Takes on Pat Metheny)

(Ghostlight Records)



Matthew Stevens

Pittsburgh

(Whirlwind Recordings)



Steve Gibb

The Boatman

(Self-released)

Different Strokes

Three new releases show diverse approaches to fingerstyle mastery

BY BLAIR JACKSON

As decades pass, the great jazz guitarist Pat Metheny is increasingly being recognized not only as one of the instrument's supreme players, but also one of its most interesting composers. Even so, encountering a full album of solo guitar interpretations of Metheny feels like a gift from the gods, especially coming from the magnificent interpreter John Pizzarelli, who recorded his latest album, *Better Days Ahead*, on a single seven-string Moll classical guitar during pandemic isolation after the death of both of his parents from COVID. (See interview on page 14).

Pizzarelli is not the first solo guitarist to explore Metheny on nylon-string guitar—back in 2005, classical master Jason Vieaux recorded his exquisite *Images of Metheny*, which included several of the same tunes—but Pizzarelli brings his own approach and a lifetime of sensitive interpretation to this wide-ranging body of work, and he was able to locate the emotional

essence of each of these pieces. This is no easy feat, as so many of Metheny's albums have featured his Group (spearheaded by keyboardist Lyle Mays) and his compositions often have complex instrumental voicings that make translation to solo guitar challenging. But the core of Metheny's writing and playing has always been melody, so whether Pizzarelli tackles ballads like "Letter from Home" and "Antonia," or more propulsive pieces like "Last Train Home" and "Phase Dance," his reductive interpretations somehow feel natural and right.

These are honest performances that haven't had the life tweezed out of them through editing. The downside of that approach is that there are quite a few buzzing bass strings and imperfectly struck notes, a price worth paying to hear music with so much heart.

Toronto-born guitarist Matthew Stevens is, like Pizzarelli, part of New York's expansive jazz scene, perhaps best known for his support work for artists such as Esperanza Spalding and Terri Lyne Carrington. But that's where the similarities end. His first solo acoustic album, *Pittsburgh*, shows Stevens to be a highly adventurous and distinctly modern player and composer, as he ranges from rhythmically off-kilter, slightly outside (in the jazz sense) pieces to more conventional ballad statements, with lots of tonal range in between. He can embrace dissonance in one moment and follow it with folksy strums, jazz shadings, or delicate finger-picked melodies. A few of the tracks feel more

like sketches than actual compositions; clearly many (most?) were born out of improvisations, and he keeps them concise.

It makes for a highly unpredictable but ultimately satisfying experience if you're willing to follow him down the many different pathways of this musical odyssey. Throughout, Stevens plays a lovely, crisp-sounding 1956 mahogany Martin 00-17.

Steve Gibb's *The Boatman* is the most traditional of these three solo fingerstyle albums and also my favorite. A native of Scotland who has lived in the U.S. for the past 21 years, he draws heavily on his roots, presenting Irish jigs and Scottish reels and many a tune that sound influenced by the folk music of those two cultures. But he also has embraced the gentle, pastoral melodicism of the Will Ackerman/Alex de Grassi school of solo guitar—with its uplifting consonance and rippling contours—as well as elements from his days studying classical guitar: his tune "Elegy for a Rainbow" features tremolo work that could have come from the pen of Francisco Tárrega, surrounded by glistering Windham Hill-esque folk. (Gibb's career has taken a number of interesting turns—check out his bio at stevegibb.com.)

Gibb plays two guitars on the album, a 2010 Matthew Mustapick Arena Custom and a Journey Instruments FF412C. He did the engineering and production himself and it couldn't sound better. Beautiful, deep, and soulful, *The Boatman* is a winner on every level. **AC**

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Charlie Parr

Last of the Better Days Ahead

(Smithsonian Folkways)

An evocative storehouse of memories and impressions

On the title track of his seventeenth album, *Last of the Better Days Ahead*, Minnesota roots songwriter and guitarist Charlie Parr grapples with the belated recognition of the worth of things long vanished. As Parr crosspicks a cascading series of glissandos, punctuated with the rattlesnake buzz of loose strings, he laments a long-gone 1964 Ford Falcon in a raspy croon that sounds both ancient and familiar. It's clear that Parr, now in his mid-50s, misses the untapped youth the car symbolizes rather than the machine itself, but that doesn't mean this lyrical, elegiac album wants for energy and a sprightly sense of adventure.

Adopting an outdated term for Memorial Day, "Decoration Day" opens gently before plunging into a wiry, jangling instrumental that suggests a metallic and muscular cousin of Jorma Kaukonen's "Embryonic Journey." With the loping, leathery sashay "On Listening to Robert Johnson," Parr's voice approximates Johnson's haunted wail, but he tells his own story—a reverie of hearing spectral music in the night. "Bed of Wasps" channels the spare folk of Woody Guthrie, one of Parr's inspirations. Parr's grainy voice weaves around appropriately ringing and stinging single notes that vibrate with the tension of long bottled-up emotions.

Woody wobbling notes, like voices echoing across the water, announce "Blues for Whitefish Lake, 1975." Here, with meditative picking, Parr limns a scene of darkening pines, a rotted boat dock, and the expectation of hearing his father's voice, which never comes. It's a reminder that our memories may not reflect anything that actually happened, but they shape us nonetheless. —Pat Moran



John Hiatt with the Jerry Douglas Band

Leftover Feelings

(New West)

A perfect match of songs and musicians

Teaming up with his resonator-playing neighbor Jerry Douglas was a genius move for songwriting legend John Hiatt, and it gives these 11 tracks a deep, woody warmth without losing any of their bittersweetness. The settings in *Leftover Feelings*, recorded live in Nashville's historic RCA Studio B, find the middle ground between wisdom and cleverness, country and bluegrass, making these performances some of the finest in Hiatt's 50-year career.

Channeling a lost love, Hiatt tells the story of an ill-fated romance in "All the Lilacs in Ohio," beginning with too much whiskey—"You met her there on a New York City stair/You were throwing up on your shoes"—and ending with the main character's only souvenir, a perfumed handkerchief he still keeps by his bed. Channeling another in "I'm in Asheville," the singer can't stop the "leftover feelings" that come from being the one who couldn't turn his car around, realizing "there's some things you can't come back from/if there's some things you won't go through."

There's humor too, in "Long Black Electric Cadillac" and "Little Goodnight," where a newborn baby won't let her weary parents get any rest. But it's the sad songs—especially "Light of the Burning Sun," about the brother who committed suicide when Hiatt was nine years old—that shine brightest, filled with lines that dazzle in their detail, punctuated by Douglas's always-perfect resonator guitar and lap steel. Hiatt's 1942 Gibson LG-2 rings with a steady, warm authority, and support from Daniel Cambronero (upright bass), Mike Seal (acoustic and electric guitars), and Christian Sedelmyer (violin) makes this album a beautifully unsettling gem. —Kenny Berkowitz



Joseph Spence

Encore: Unheard Recordings of Bahamian Guitar and Singing

(Smithsonian Folkways)

Unreleased treasures from idiosyncratic folkie

There have always been singer-songwriters whose vocals are an acquired taste: Bob Dylan, Joanna Newsom, and Leon Redbone come to mind. And then there's Joseph Spence—the late Bahamian folk artist (1910–1984) possessed a gravelly, mumbling vocal style. But behind the idiosyncratic singing lay joy, a freewheeling and primitive fingerpicking style, and a unique blend of folk, blues, gospel, and calypso influences. Among those who have paid tribute to him through the years are Richard Thompson, the Grateful Dead, Martin Carthy, the Incredible String Band, Ry Cooder, and Taj Mahal.

The folk archivists Sam and Ann Charters first recorded Spence in 1958 while conducting fieldwork in a remote Bahamian fishing village on the island of Andros. Producer and engineer Peter Siegel recorded these previously unreleased recordings in 1965 in New York City and the Bahamas. Unlike, say, blues artist Mississippi John Hurt, who was grounded in the guitar style of a particular region, Spence found inspiration in various Bahamian song styles, especially the fast-paced, syncopated call-and-response songs of the local fishermen. You can hear that influence in his unique bass runs, which forgo alternating bass notes commonly heard in country blues and bluegrass to replicate a bass singer. The tracks include such familiar Spence songs as "Out on the Rolling Sea," "Bimini Gal," and "Give Me That Old-Time Religion," as well as the ballad "Run Come See Jerusalem," "Death and the Woman" (a version of the old-time hymn "O Death"), and the ebullient "Won't That Be a Happy Time." —Greg Cahill



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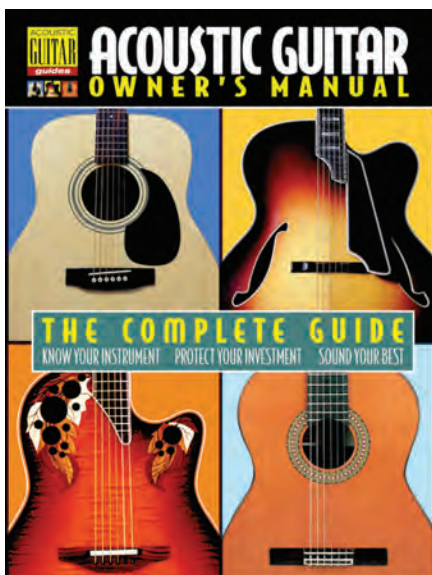
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1943 Martin 000-18

**A pristine wartime flattop
with a fascinating history**

BY GREG OLWELL

Aside from being a vintage Martin from a sought-after era, the 1943 000-18 that sold in *Acoustic Guitar*'s May 2021 auction came with a story that was too good not to share. The instrument's first owner was Lorenzo Monzo, a Spanish immigrant to Monterey, California. Monzo was a regular performer along that city's famed Cannery Row, and in 1943 he received the 000-18 as a gift from his wife.

Decades after Monzo's 1956 passing, his daughter showed the guitar to her physician, Alexander Holmes, an amateur musician in Monterey. When he opened the chipboard case, he was surprised to find not just the guitar in pristine condition but also artifacts like a blow-horn pitch pipe and an Anacin aspirin tin containing abalone guitar picks Monzo had apparently fashioned by hand. After an appraisal, Holmes purchased the guitar and kept it until the sale earlier this year.

Like other Martins built between 1942 and 1945, this example's neck has an ebony support block instead of a steel T-bar. Wartime steel shortages meant that the guitar maker had to drop the T-bar, which had been in use since 1934, for a rectangular ebony rod. As a result, the Martins from this era are known for being very lightweight and responsive.

When the digital gavel dropped, the auction's winner was Jay Shapiro, a longtime AC



JOEY LUSTERMAN

reader who had been looking for an unaltered prewar or wartime Martin. As the third owner of serial number 84603, Shapiro acknowledges that one of the things that appealed to him most was the instrument's condition. "It's been regretted, but it's immaculate," he says, adding

that he loves the mahogany guitar's direct and unintrusive sound. It's always great to hear about fine guitars still turning up, and when they're in excellent condition it makes one hopeful that a chance encounter might someday lead to a guitar as special as this 000-18. **AC**



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